



78 JOBS SAVED IN RESCUE DEAL

Report by Simon Penfold

A RESCUE deal has saved the jobs of 78 Black Country workers at a firm run by five generations of a local family.

H&E Knowles (Lye), which has factories in Quarry Bank and Cradley, collapsed into administration but a deal has now been struck to sell the business to two family members.

Administrators from the restructuring services division of Mazars, the international professional services firm, secured the sale to Peter and Daniel Knowles, who have created a new business, H&E Knowles (Manufacturing).

They have purchased 'certain parts of the business and assets' from the administrators, saving all of the jobs for the 78-strong workforce.



Daniel Knowles said: "We are deeply saddened at the demise of our old family business, both for ourselves and our long standing suppliers."

"We have tried hard to save the jobs of the entire workforce. We are now looking forward to working together with the existing customers and suppliers to build a better future."

Set up nearly a century ago, H&E Knowles manufactured a wide range of products including gardenware such as wheelbarrows, greenhouses, storage units and incinerators.

Struggling

It has factories in Talbotts Lane, Quarry Bank, and at the Waterfall Lane trading estate in Cradley Heath.

It has remained under the control of the founding family for nearly a century. But recently the business had been struggling financially after some large investments it made became too costly.

The company's most recently filed accounts, for the year to the end of January 2015, show that despite a turnover of £6.7 million it made a pre-tax profit of just £54,000.

The business invested heavily in 2015 in premises and machinery, but it was unable to benefit from that investment and has since incurred losses.

Simon Chandler and Scott Bevan of Mazars were appointed joint administrators on November 30 and secured the sale to the new venture owned by Peter and Daniel Knowles.

Mr Chandler said: The sale of the business preserves and protects 78 employees."

IT'S THE FINAL PARTY FOR ACTIVE ELDERLY GROUP



Springboard staff and helpers Fran Cartwright, Alison Pugh, Sandy Jones, Shirley Jefferies, Jill Ford and Sam Mullett at the centre's last party

IT WAS the end of an era for a popular activity centre for the elderly in Brierley Hill as it held its farewell Christmas party.

More than 250 people attended the event at The Copthorne Hotel for the final gathering of The Age UK Springboard group.

Due to funding cuts - from the council and the Big Lottery Fund - it was announced earlier this year that the centre would have to shut after 13 years.

However, long-standing volunteers, clients and staff members vowed to remain upbeat in the face of adversity.

Fran Cartwright explained: "We are all really sad but we said that we would go out with a bang and we have. Over the years we have helped so many people, those who are lonely and isolated have had somewhere to go and something to look forward to."

"This gathering has been our biggest one yet and officially from today we will close. The main thing is that we have to remain upbeat and look to the future. We would like to thank everyone for their support and help over the years, including the services we have worked with and Ian Austin MP."

The centre looked after 700 people by holding weekly activities including exercise classes and ballroom dancing. They had three staff and around 40 volunteers.

June Hill, aged 72, of Colley Gate, had been volunteering at the centre for 10 years. She said: "I am very sad about the closure because it has been a big part of my life for so long." Pauline Burbidge, of Wollescote, has been attending for 12 years since the loss of her husband. She added: "It has helped me so much, in fact Springboard has changed my life. When I heard it was closing I was so upset."

ACCIDENT

Grandfather dies after being hit by car

A GRANDFATHER died after he was hit by a car on a busy road in Dudley.

Arthur Fletcher, aged 65, was treated at the scene following the accident in Priory Road but later died in hospital.

It comes little over a month since a teenage girl was killed in a crash on the same road.

Police officers spoke to the driver of a red Nissan Juke following Saturday's crash and are now investigating. No arrests have been made. In a heartfelt tribute, Mr Fletcher's family described him as a 'loving husband, father and grandfather'.

MAIL

Mayor gives thanks to postal workers

THE Mayor of Dudley has thanked local postmen and women for their hard work during the festive period.

Christmas is the Royal Mail's busiest period and has this year celebrated its 500th anniversary, marking half a millennium of delivering Christmas cards and parcels.

Councillor Mohammed Hanif visited the Dudley delivery office to see first-hand the operation of delivering Christmas post and to pass on season's greeting to its hardworking staff.

MANHUNT

Police still looking for murder suspect

POLICE are still searching for a man wanted in connection with the murder of a 24-year-old in Brierley Hill.

Mansoor Mahmood died from stab wounds after he was attacked in the High Street a month ago. He was found on October 15 at 4.45pm.

Following his death, police launched an appeal to find a 'key suspect' in the case - 19-year-old Niron Parker-Lee from Brierley Hill, who is described as dangerous. Detective Inspector Harry Harrison said: "It's important we locate Niron Parker-Lee as soon as possible and I would urge anyone with information to contact us."

INSIDE

DESPERATELY SEEKING SANTA?



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Stop low skill immigration, says MP



MP Ian Austin

GOVERNMENT must clamp down on low skilled immigrants taking the jobs of unemployed Britons, says Dudley North MP Ian Austin.

The Labour MP says cheap overseas workers are undercutting wages and preventing young British workers from getting jobs.

In a startling intervention at Home Office Questions, Mr Austin called on Amber Rudd to acknowledge the impact of low-skilled migration on different communities across the country.

"There's no point London politicians lecturing people in places like the Black

Country with national statistics because this has different impacts in different communities," he said.

"Why we low-skilled migrants coming here when we still have hundreds of thousands of unemployed people. Why haven't they stopped companies just advertising jobs abroad or using workers from overseas to undercut wages here and why don't they require large firms to train up local apprentices if they do have to hire abroad?"

In response the Home Secretary said Mr Austin's comments were 'a little rich' as Labour had failed to control immigra-

tion when it was in power. "There are no lectures coming from my party—only hard answers," she said. "The answer is that we will be restricting immigration when we move to leaving the European Union."

Mr Austin set out a range of measures to manage the impact of low-skilled migration, including stopping companies from only advertising jobs abroad and requiring large firms to train up local apprentices. But he came under attack from shadow home secretary Diane Abbott, who accused Labour MPs that discussed immigration of trying to outdo UKIP.

Monks forgive father — island's first criminal

A TOURIST from Dudley who became the first convicted criminal on a holy island off the Welsh coast has walked free from court — after apologising to the monks for disturbing their peace.

The 45-year-old father, who was visiting Caldey Island, a boat ride from the resort town Tenby, admitted assaulting his 'naughty' seven-year-old son during a day trip to a chocolate factory run by the brothers.

It was the first conviction in living memory on the island, which has a population 40. The father, who cannot be named for legal reasons, appeared in court at Haverfordwest to confess lifting his son off the ground by the scruff of the neck, slapping him and frogmarching him away.

The man was handed a £200 fine and a community order after the court heard he was 'very sorry' for the offence.

Police were called to the island, which is home to an order of monks who follow a vow of silence, after the incident was reported. Officers had to be carried by RNLI lifeboat the two miles to the island off the Pembrokeshire coast to make the arrest.

More than 3,000 visitors make trip from April to October to visit the island where Cistercian monks make chocolate, shortbread and perfume.

Age

Prosecutor Vaughan Pritchard-Jones told the court that the child, diagnosed with ADHD and autism, had been 'quite naughty' on the day in question but the father's actions went beyond 'reasonable chastisement'. "He picked him up by the neck so he could look him in the eye and tell him off. He appears to have been in quite a rage," he said.

He later broke down during a police interview and stated he would never hurt his son. Defending lawyer Mike Kelleher said his client apologised for his offence and accepted he may have 'gone too far'.

He added: "As a result of this incident, the help and assistance that this family has been asking for for a very long time, has suddenly come into place."

Magistrates imposed an 18 month community order, £200 fine, £85 court costs and £85 victim surcharge.

Express delivery for Beacon Centre



Beacon Centre service user Brian Ellis, aged 78, with the donated cheque from National Express

NATIONAL Express has donated £1,000 to Beacon Centre for the Blind.

The public was asked by the bus company to nominate which local charities they wanted the money to go to.

The 'National Expressmas' coach stopped off at the charity's HQ in Sedgley for the cheque to be handed over by driver David Adjarkoh to Beacon services user Brian Ellis, aged 78.

Beacon partnership manager Donna Gordon, said: "It's absolutely brilliant to have been chosen by so many in the community to receive this donation and warming to know our work is viewed in this way."

"We have been fortunate to see a great relationship develop with the local community in many different ways and areas."

"We would like to extend a huge thanks to the National Express team for making this happen."

"It makes such a huge difference to the projects we look to implement and service users."

Visit www.nationalexpressmas.com for more information about the company's campaign.

Inquest has opened on fatal factory tank explosion

AN INQUEST has opened into the death of a Pensnett man after a storage tank that had contained methanol exploded at a factory.

Raymond Wyman was working at KTC Edibles Limited, in Heath Road, Wednesbury, when the explosion happened on October 31.

Mr Wyman had been on top of the four metre tank, which was used by former site owners Caparo to store methanol, Black Country Coroners Court heard.

He had been using a cutting torch. The inquest heard that the torch was believed to have ignited methanol, causing the explosion.

Mr Wyman was taken to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham but died on November 8.

Detective Sergeant Rob Bastin, of West Midlands Police, said: "It was a large warehouse that used to be owned by Caparo. It then went into receivership and KTC Edibles Limited bought it in order to store food stuff."

"KTC employed two contractors to do building work including NKD Machinery Limited. At the time Mr Wyman was self-employed but was employed by the owners of NKD to do ad-hoc labour work."

Amanda James, from the Health and Safety Executive construction division, confirmed the tank had contained methanol.

The inquest was adjourned until January 31 by Senior Coroner Zafar Siddique and he urged representatives of both companies to attend.

Motorist in court after collision

A MAN from Dudley has been charged in connection with a two-car crash that injured three people, including a six-year-old girl.

Harry Allen, aged 51, of Stanhope Street, was charged with driving a motor vehicle with an alcohol level above the drink-drive limit and was bailed to appear at Kidderminster Magistrates Court on Tuesday, December 20.

The collision took place on Egghill Lane, Franksley, on Sunday, December 4, at around 8.40pm, involving a blue Jaguar X Type and a black Vauxhall Corsa.

West Midlands Ambulance Service arrived to find one of the cars in a ditch. The girl had suffered a chest injury, a blow to the head and wrist pain. A man and a woman sustained cuts.

Anyone with information is asked to call police on 101 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555111.

Carnival appeal

ORGANISERS of the annual Halesowen Carnival are looking for businesses to sponsor the 2017 event at Highfield Park on July 1. Sponsorship is needed for the stage, carnival king and queen competition and dog show. E-mail halesowencarnival@gmail.com

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Pet ban on owner after cats died in filthy house

A WOMAN has been banned for keeping animals for life after two cats starved to death at a filthy house in Stourbridge.

The RSPCA said both animals had 'suffered immensely'.

A member of the public raised the alarm after spotting the body of one of the cats through the window of the house in Bridle Road in March. The RSPCA and a police officer found the second cat in the toilet.

Pets owner Karen Whittingham, 44, of Winsford Avenue, Kingswinford, appeared at Birmingham Magistrates Court last week after being found guilty in her absence earlier in the year of causing unnecessary suffering to the two cats by failing to feed them.

She was also found guilty of failing to ensure the cats were housed in a suitable environment.

Whittingham was given a four-month prison sentence suspended for 12 months, ordered to do 120 hours of unpaid work and to pay costs of £500 and an £85 victim surcharge.

RSPCA inspector Paul Seddon said: "I've been an inspector for 34 years and I am still haunted by the image of the cat in the toilet."

"Both cats were clearly emaciated and it is possible that the cat in the toilet was trying to get some fluid when he died. There was no evidence of food or water being left in the house. The house was in a total state of disarray. These two poor cats would have suffered immensely before they died."

Temporary camp bid for travellers

A 'HOLDING' park for travellers could be set up to help a council tackle the problem of illegal camps in the Black Country.

Tipton is being considered for the transit site for caravans along with the Black Patch area of Smethwick and Oldbury.

The idea comes after Sandwell Council saw a 20 per cent rise in traveller camps, which has cost £250,000 this year alone in clean up and legal bills after sites were invaded. It would mean the council could bring new police powers into force enabling it to move on travellers within 24 hours, like neighbouring Walsall can.

Smethwick's Councillor Richard Marshall said: "We are looking at various sites across the borough. There has been an increase in travellers across the borough over the past 12 months and it has cost the taxpayer a hell of a lot of money."

Storage depot use

AN INDUSTRIAL building is being extended in Stourbridge as a storage and distribution depot. A change of use application has been submitted for Vulcan Works on Hayes Lane.

Surgery is improving, says watchdog

A DOCTORS' surgery in Brierley Hill has been told it still needs improvements despite battling its way out of special measures.

The Waterfront Surgery, at Brierley Hill Health and Social Care Centre, which has more than 8,300 registered patients, was put in special measures last year.

It was told to review the process for managing medicines that were no longer in use and out of date. An inspection last year found the medical centre in Venture Way was breaching Good Governance and Cleanliness and Infection Control regulations.

Officers from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) returned to the medical centre on September 6 this year to find the surgery had successfully followed

its plan to meet the legal requirements. It has since been removed from special measures.

After its most recent visit on December 1, the surgery was told it still needed to see improvements.

Dementia

The practice requires improvement for 'providing effective and caring services older people, people with long term conditions, families, children and young people, working age people, vulnerable people and people with mental health', says to the report.

A total of 76 per cent of patients diagnosed with dementia had their care reviewed in face to face meetings in the last 12 months - but that figure was lower than the national average of 84 per cent.

The practice was praised by inspectors for making vast improvements since 2015.

An infection control audit had been completed and evidence provided that systems have been put in place to keep patients safe. The report also stated facilities at the centre were deemed to be good and it was well equipped. Patients also found it easier to make an appointment with the new telephone system in place and urgent appointments were available the same day.

Practice manager Raj Dau said: "The results of our recent CQC inspection reflects the hard work and commitment of our staff to swiftly address the issues that CQC identified. We are committed to continue making progress."

Pervert church-goer is caught by the FBI

THE FBI helped snare a Black Country church-goer who made hundreds of indecent images of children.

Andrew Day, aged 37, was found to have made 189 indecent images of children, 39 of which were in the worst category, and 213 moving images, of which 133 were in the worst category, between 2006 and 2015.

Having taken the pictures the Halesowen man posted many to a Russian website visited by paedophiles but his offences were eventually brought to an end after FBI investigators in the US found the images online and contacted the National Crime Agency.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard that Day had taken photos up the skirts of young girls without them knowing. He had also stolen underwear belonging to girls and women.

Day was jailed for two years having pleaded guilty to six charges of taking indecent images of children, another of committing an act outraging public decency and a further three counts of theft.

Prosecuting, Mr Gary Cook, said Day had posted a total of eight albums of images to the Russian website. He said: "US intelligence agencies oversee websites around the world, including those people who have a sexual interest in children visit. This was one of them."

Raided

The Americans liaised with police in the UK and Day's home in Olive Lane was raided by officers. They seized two mobile phones, a tablet computer, a hard-drive, a flash-drive and items of underwear with notes on who had owned them. They found a picture of a woman from whom he had stolen underwear.

Defending, Mr John Lucas, said the case was 'odd' in that Day had posted the images online for his 'personal pleasure'.

He added: "The benefit in posting these images would seem to me to be the defendants and the defendants alone. Perhaps it was the 'shock factor' in putting them on the internet which somehow gave him that pleasure."

Judge Marcus Tregilgas-Davey said he accepted they had not been posted for profit but considered it to be distribution of the images.

He also imposed a prevention order on Day, who had no previous convictions, which prohibits him from engaging with children and other vulnerable people for a period of 10 years.

Megan is 1,000th research patient



Halesowen College student Megan Wood, of Quarry Bank, has been cared for by the hospital since she was two

A TEENAGER from the Black Country has become the 1,000th patient recruited at Birmingham Children's Hospital for a project that aims to transform the diagnosis and treatment of rare diseases and cancer.

The recruitment of Megan Wood, aged 18, from Quarry Bank, to the 100,000 Genomes Project signalled the milestone for the dedicated team at the leading paediatric hospital. The initiative, the first of its type in the world, is working to decode complete sets of

genetic information to help scientists and doctors understand more about specific conditions.

Megan has been cared for by the hospital since she was two, when she was diagnosed with systemic onset juvenile idiopathic arthritis and, later, interstitial lung disease. She hopes that taking part in the project could help with more targeted treatment for both herself and others.

Megan, who attends Halesowen College, said: "It can be really frustrating at times because my

condition can mean I can't do everyday things. I'm hoping by taking part it might lead to more of an explanation on what causes the problems."

Dr Larissa Kerecuk, clinical lead for rare diseases at Birmingham Children's Hospital, said: "Our team work tirelessly to promote the exciting initiative that could potentially transform healthcare in years to come. We'd like to say a huge thank-you to Megan and all of our patients that have agreed to take part."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Staff threatened by shop raiders

A GANG of robbers armed with a knife and a baseball bat threatened staff and demanded cash during a raid at a village supermarket.

Three men threatened staff and customers at the Co-op store in Kinner High Street just before 10pm on Thursday night.

Police say the staff were left 'shaken' following the ordeal, in which cash and cigarettes were taken but no one was injured.

The raiders were wearing balaclavas or hoods. Anyone with information should call police on 101.

Business booming at Co-op Travel

A TRAVEL agent with branches across the Black Country has seen its sales rise by nearly a fifth.

The Midlands Co-operative Travel expects its revenue to top £335 million, up from £75m just five years ago, after seeing its sales increase by 17 per cent in the last year.

The company operates 56 high street branches, has more than 150 home-based travel consultants and 39 independent agents selling their travel products. It has branches in Dudley, Wall Heath, Kingswinford, Sedgley, Stourbridge and Halesowen.

Man is charged after car hits wall

A 25-year-old Wombourne man has been charged with drink-driving after his car hit a wall in Stourbridge.

The incident happened on Hagley Road in Oldswinford at 11.20pm on Thursday.

Images from the scene show that a blue Jaguar was badly damaged.

Thomas Shakespeare, of Miller Lane, has been charged in relation to the incident and is due to appear at Dudley magistrates' court on December 23.

More than 20 jobs face axe at welders' centre

MORE than 20 workers in Tipton are set to lose their jobs as engineering group Doosan Babcock cuts 500 jobs across the UK.

A total of 25 jobs will be axed at the company's training centre at Birmingham New Road, where apprentice welders are taught.

The company employs around 3,800 at its sites across the UK. The bulk of the positions affected are in management, back-office support and at the factory in Renfrew, Scotland.

Roadwork traffic lights

MOTORISTS can expect delays due to temporary traffic lights while maintenance work takes place on a busy road in Brierley Hill.

The signals will be in place until next Friday, December 23, while the work is being carried out on Moor Street.

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THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



WEATHER-forecasting terms. Remind me again. Are dribs and drabs wetter than spits and spots?

THE Government's £10 Christmas bonus arrived in 1.2 million bank accounts this week. If this piffing handout, unchanged since 1972, were scrapped I bet 99 per cent of recipients would not even notice. Yet it would free up tens of millions of pounds which could be spent on nurses and carers for those who really need help. All it takes is political will.

DID you begin losing the will to live as you followed the Supreme Court hearing into Brexit? That's how it is with lawyers. I've covered hundreds of court cases and heard many barristers and judges doing their stuff. You get the impression they are paid by the word. There are honourable exceptions but, as a rule, lawyers simply adore delivering long, intricate screeds punctuated with many sub-clauses and endless references to obscure precedents. There were times, as the dissection of Brexit plumbed depths of mind-screaming intricacy, when the nation would have gladly settled for the judges deciding the future of Brexit by electing one of their number to toss a coin. Heads, we're out.

BANK of England governor Mark Carney says millions of jobs could be lost as a result of automation and robots. This news is greeted as a nightmare. Which is odd because the last time it came around, it was regarded as a dream. In the 1930s, automation promised an end to mankind's drudgery. Columnist, Phil Hickman, once told me the dream of the pre-war years was that people would have to work only a few hours per week "and we'd spend the rest of our time writing poetry and making mandolins and suchlike." It never happened. The Second World War came along and kept everybody busy for six years. The following decades were spent recovering. Today the prospect of jobs being taken by machines fills us with dread. But why? I bet the answer is that the jobs we do today, mostly in warm, clean offices, are far removed from the dirty, back-breaking labour of yore. Work gives us status and colleagues. We don't want it to end. If the age of the robots is coming, we will have to make them our servants, not our masters, and find new ways of keeping ourselves occupied. Anybody want a mandolin?

THIS is hardly a scientific survey but our local corner shop sold 40 books of stamps in a single day, which is apparently outstanding even for the time of year. Could it be that Christmas cards are regaining lost ground? Surely it was only a matter of time before people realised that a multiple-address Xmas email doesn't really hit the spot.

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

Teen in high-speed pursuit spared jail

A BLACK Country teenager involved in a terrifying high speed pursuit in Dudley in which he hit another vehicle and a wall has been spared a time behind bars.

Warehouse worker Shaheed Khalique, aged 19, hit speeds over 70mph in residential areas during the chase after he failed to pull over for a police patrol car.

He sped through two sets of traffic

lights on red, went the wrong way down a one-way street at over 40mph and swerved to the wrong side of the road on bends.

He went between a bus and a parked vehicle and struck the car but carried on at speed, said Mr Peter Grice prosecuting.

He added that the nine-minute chase began in Trindle Road and Khalique hit a wall before

eventually pulled his car to a halt near the Birmingham Road.

Judge Simon Ward, told Khalique: "It has been a real struggle for me not to send you straight to prison, but the feeling I have got is that it just would not be right thing to do to lock you up."

He ruled that instead he would give him a chance after being told of his determined efforts to gain em-

ployment and to put his life back on the right track.

Khalique, now living in Gravelly Hill North, Erdington, admitted driving dangerously, without a licence and without insurance. He was given an eight-month jail term, suspended for two years, ordered to carry out 160 hours unpaid work and disqualified from driving for three years. He must pay £340 costs.

Online casino company is recruiting more staff

ONLINE casino games developer Intouch is aiming to double in size over the next two years, with a major boost in jobs at its headquarters in Halesowen.

Intouch Games is a major part of Birmingham's thriving tech industry and has enjoyed a bumper year, developing online and mobile casino games, which has seen a 228 per cent rise in its UK employees over the past 18 months.

The company, owner of the mFortune and PocketWin casino brands, attributes its success to the "highly collaborative nature" of its teams.

"mFortune's journey is inspiring," said Sumit Lakhina, marketing manager at mFortune. "It's amazing to see how the company has emerged to be one of the leading online gaming companies in such a short period."

After being named by The London Stock Exchange Group as one of the 1,000 companies to inspire Britain last year, Intouch Games is starting 2017 with a drive to expand the 200-strong team based at Fountain House in Halesowen.

"We are expecting to double in size again in the next 24 months, and the opportunities are endless," explained Harriet Grant, HR manager at mFortune.

"From computer programming and graphic design, to marketing and customer service, we're looking for people who are not only great at what they do, but dynamic and enthusiastic. We want people with bags of initiative to join us on this exciting journey."

007 ball raised £3,000 for school

BUSINESSES have supported a primary school in hosting an annual ball that raised more than £3,000 to help pupils.

The James Bond themed ball, held at the Granary Hotel, Kidderminster, was attended by 160 parents, friends and family from Oldswinford Church of England Primary School.

Stourbridge businesses sponsored tables at the event and donated prizes for a raffle.

Jo Dandy, ball organiser and parent, said: "We have been delighted and completely overwhelmed by the generous support we have received from the local community to make this fantastic event happen."

"We're really pleased that we were able to raise money to continue to support the school."

Christingle service is held in aid of charity

A CHRISTINGLE family service, celebrating Jesus Christ as 'light of the world', will be held at St Peter's Church in Upper Gornal on Christmas Eve. The event raising money for charity the Children's Society and is at the Kent Street church from 6pm.

Poorest families to pay more council tax

By Clare Butler

THE poorest families across Dudley borough will have to pay more council tax after cost-cutting moves were approved.

Struggling families currently only have to pay 20 per cent of their total council tax bill under a relief scheme.

But they will have to find extra cash as the amount they have to pay goes up two per cent from April 1 next year.

Councillor David Sparks, cabinet member for finance and legal services at Dudley Council, said it was a cut that had been 'forced' upon the council by the Government.

The move was approved by councillors at full council meeting last week and is expected to save the authority £150,000 in a year.

Councillor Sparks said: "The council tax reduction scheme will go up in Dudley. This is because when the Government in 2013 transferred the payments of housing benefits through the local authorities they reduced by ten per cent the amount of money we had to plan these benefits."

Subsidising

"Council tax payers in Dudley have been subsidising this funding gap for several years. This Government is reducing the ability of Dudley to meet its funding gap and forcing us to make cuts and increase council tax. We have no option but to reduce the council tax reduction scheme. This is not a cut we would choose to make. We have been forced to do so."

Voicing his opposition to the plans, Conservative councillor Steve Clark, shadow member for finance, labelled the move as 'very disappointing' adding that the most vulnerable would be affected.

Currently those eligible in an average Band D property pay £267.56 annually towards the full charge of £1,337.8. Next year's council tax has yet to be set but, if it remains the same, it will rise to £294.32.

Pies not the limit for bostin' butcher



Award-winning butcher Adam Lang, front, with staff, from left, sister Emma Lang, Tony Dale and father Peter Lang

A BLACK Country butcher proved he is a cut above the rest after winning a national competition – again.

Adam Lang, owner of Langs of Wollaston, Stourbridge, won best in show for his chicken and mushroom pie at the English Winter Fair. Mr Lang also won six gold and four silver awards for his pies and sausages. Last year he won the competition's overall champion pie-crown.

Mr Lang puts his success down to hard work, secret recipes and using quality ingredients. The 39-year-old from Sedgley said: "We are really pleased to have won the awards because it just goes to show everything that we are doing in the shop is extra special."

"It really means a lot when you can put your name to

something you have worked hard for. Our secret to success would be down to working hard to get the product right, dedication and knowing the market."

"Everything we put in our products has to be quality. We use a secret recipe for our pies and sausages which we make on the premises," he said.

Mr Lang is no stranger to winning at the show. "I have been going for eight years and been winning awards for seven," he said.

Last year he beat competition to win the overall champion pie crown, alongside claiming eight gold awards. The English Winter Fair is run by the Staffordshire and Birmingham Agricultural Society and held at Staffordshire County Showground.

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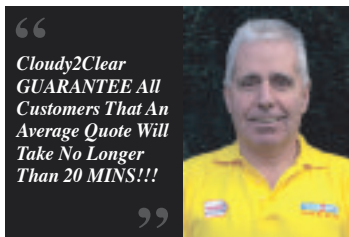
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£1bn Tata pledge to safeguard steel jobs

STEEL unions say they have a £1 billion commitment from Tata Steel to secure jobs at Brierley Hill and other Black Country sites as well as the major Port Talbot steelworks.

Officials from Community, Unite and the GMB talked over proposals with representatives from Tata plants across the country, including the Black Country sites in Wednesfield, Walsall and Brierley Hill, which employ around 600 of Tata Steel's 9,000 UK workers.

A number of 'significant' measures from Tata include keeping two blast furnaces at the South Wales plant for five years, a commitment to seek to avoid compulsory redundancies for a similar period, a 10-year investment plan of £1bn and consultation on replacing the work pension with a defined benefit scheme.

The future of Tata plants have been in doubt since its UK business was put up for sale in March. The Indian conglomerate put that sale on hold in the summer as it considered a tie-up with German steelmaker ThyssenKrupp.

But fresh hope that Tata would retain the business came after a boardroom coup saw company chairman Cyrus Mistry dumped and the return of former boss Ratan Tata, the man who spearheaded Tata's takeover of both steel business, Corus, and Jaguar Land Rover in 2007.

Roy Rickhuss, general secretary of Community union, said: "This proposal would secure jobs for years to come and bring serious investment."

Pair in court over car crash death

TWO men have appeared in court over a crash in which a teenage mother died after the car she was in hit a wall.

Nadine Foster, 18, of Stourbridge, was travelling in a Ford Focus when it crashed on April 16, at around 2.20am. She died days after the crash on Hagley Road, Oldswinford.

Dylan Stringer, 23, of Wychbury Road, Stourbridge, and Joseph Chance, 24, of Murcroft Road, Stourbridge, are charged with causing death by dangerous driving and causing death by driving a vehicle unlicensed and uninsured.

The men were granted bail by Walsall magistrates last week and they are at Wolverhampton Crown Court on January 4.

Bully is signing books at Merry Hill

WOLVES legend Steve Bull will be visiting Merry Hill shopping centre to sign copies of his book *Bully* - *Forever Wolves*. He will be on the lower mall near Debenhams on December 18 between noon and 4pm.

90mph driver is jailed after chase

A DANGEROUS driver has been jailed after reaching speeds of 90mph in a 30mph zone while being pursued by police through Netherton.

After smashing into an oncoming car, Daanyaal Alias then blamed police for forcing him to tear through the streets.

The 20-year-old, who had only recently passed his driving test, raced over speed humps at 58mph, drove the wrong way down a one-way road, ignored a red light and sped over a narrow humpback bridge in a Vauxhall Vectra.

At Wolverhampton Crown Court last week Judge Marcus Tregilgas-Davey sentenced Alias to 18 months behind bars. He said it was 'sheer good fortune' that nobody had been killed. Prosecuting,

Miss Fiona Cortese, said Alias, of Lupin Road, Kates Hill, was spotted by police 'tailgating' other cars in Cinder Bank on August 11.

The officers, who were in an unmarked car, checked the details of his car and found he was not insured.

Reverse

But when they switched on their flashing lights Alias sped off along Northfield Road.

He led the police to Halesowen Road, and then Cradley Road, before smashing into a wall at Griffin Street. Miss Cortese said he was able to reverse away and continue, returning to Halesowen Road, which is where he reached 90mph. Alias drove

through a red light before then flying over the narrow humpback bridge in Springfield Lane at 55mph.

The chase came to a dramatic end one mile away in Oakham Avenue when Alias failed to cut a corner and hit a Vauxhall Astra. Miss Cortese, said: "He showed no remorse. He said he was unlucky to be caught and that it was the police's fault for chasing him."

Defending, Marcus Harry, said his client had made a 'foolish' decision. Judge Tregilgas-Davey told him: "It was by sheer good fortune that you didn't kill someone, and I include in that yourself."

Alias was sentenced for 12 months on one count of dangerous driving and had six months of a suspended sentence activated by the judge.

Trust extends nurse recruitment search

BOSSES of a Dudley hospital are extending its international recruitment programme to nurses who qualified overseas but are living in the UK.

The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust is offering band two contracts and a bespoke training package to help such recruits obtain the final stages of their registration with the Nursing and Midwifery Council.

Hospital bosses said applicants need to have passed their international English test and have an active registration PIN in their own country.

Head of non-medical education, Carol Love-Mecrow, said: "Candidates who complete our training programme successfully are guaranteed a full-time band five post. In return, they need to commit to staying with the trust for 12 months."

Chiefs said the trust is doing all it can to recruit against the backdrop of a national shortage of nurses and midwives. It holds regular recruitment days, is encouraging former and retired health professionals to return to practice and is exploring further recruitment from EU countries.

Investing

"We are committed to investing in the local community and recognise that there is a rich pool of talent that has gone untapped," said Mrs Love-Mecrow. "We would be delighted to welcome foreign nurses living in the UK."

The job advert went live on November 21 and the trust has already received 12 applications from nurses who meet the required level of qualifications.

Mrs Love-Mecrow added: "Our advert will stay live on NHS Jobs until December 20 - but we do reserve the right to close the vacancy prior to the advertised date."

Nurses interested in working for the Dudley Group should go to the NHS Jobs website and search for 'International Registered Nurses (with IELTS) Programme' - job reference 253-A-16-25030.

The Dudley Group is one of the top performing trusts in the country. However, bosses have struggled to fill shifts at Russells Hall Hospital in recent months.

Doctor Paul Harrison, acting chief executive at the trust, said: "We have robust escalation systems to manage these situations and patient safety was maintained in all cases."

Everest trek raises £700 for hospice



David Lewis and Dave Tong flying the Black Country flag in Nepal at the Mount Everest base camp

ADVENTURERS aged in their 60s have climbed 17,000 feet to Mount Everest's base camp in Nepal to raise money for Mary Stevens Hospice in Stourbridge.

Wordsley duo David Lewis and Dave Tong, both 61, reached the iconic base camp in the Himalayas on November 15 and raised £700 for the hospice in the process.

The charity is close to Mr Lewis' heart as its staff have cared for some of his closest friends.

Once they reached base camp, the climbers proudly unfurled the Black Country flag.

David said: "I was given a tour of the hospice a week before we embarked on the climb and I was gobsmacked, they do such a fantastic job."

"My friend Aiden Doyle was an outdoor guy and I think he set the record for the longest survivor as he'd been in there six months. He fought right until the end."

David, who works at the Crystal Leisure Centre in Stourbridge as a fitness instructor, added: "We have done a fair bit of adventurous stuff over the years but this was a good test."

"Every day was really tough but the scenery and the people we were with made it all absolutely tremendous."

To donate to the appeal to visit www.givepenny.com/Dave-Lewis-Everest

NEWS IN BRIEF

Three deny plot to murder man

THREE people have denied conspiring to murder a man who was found seriously injured in a Langley street.

Nazim Khan, also known as Manvir Singh, aged 21, of no fixed address, 20-year-old Zaqir Islaam from Lime Road, Wednesbury, and Balbir Kaur, aged 42, of Alfred Gun House, Oldbury, deny conspiring with others to murder Samson Masih, 36, on October 12.

The three appeared at Wolverhampton Crown Court on December 6, where they are due to stand trial next May.

Major investment for packaging firm

A DUDLEY packaging manufacturer has invested in new high-speed advanced production machinery, supported by a six-figure loan from HSBC.

Smithpack manufactures and supplies bespoke corrugated boxes and packaging to a wide variety of industrial customers, including several major international automotive manufacturers. The new equipment enables regular corrugated cases to be produced through a single computerised production line, increasing production capacity by more than 50 per cent.

Mayor's mile to encourage pupils

THE Mayor of Dudley joined school pupils for a mile run as part of a national project to help keep children fit and healthy.

Councillor Mohammed Hanif visited St James's C of E School in Stourbridge to join staff and pupils as they ran their Daily Mile around the school grounds.

The event was part of a nationwide initiative aimed at getting children to run a mile and learn the importance of keeping fit and active.

Cinderella pantomime fun in Brierley Hill

BRIERLEY Hill Musical Theatre Company will be staging its annual pantomime in January.

Cinderella will be performed at Brierley Hill Civic Hall on January 14, 15, 19, 20 and 21. Tickets for the show are £10 and can be booked by calling the box office on 0845 658 8095. See the www.bhmtc.co.uk website.

The company have been staging pantos for more than 25 years and earlier this year produced *Beauty and the Beast*.

New Year gala concert

A VIENNESE Gala concert will be performed in Stourbridge Town Hall next month. Stourbridge Choir and Orchestra will be performing to raise funds for Mary Stevens Hospice and Rotary charities on January 7 at 3pm. Tickets are £10 (£5 under-16s) on (01384) 373111.

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IN MY VIEW

with Mark Andrews



Puncture? It wheely should not be so hard

I SUPPOSE it was inevitable, following last week's rant about the disruption caused by pothole repairs, that I would immediately come a cropper by driving over one.

So it came as no surprise that two days later I had a puncture caused by a big pothole in a country lane just around the corner from the roadworks in Seisdon I had been complaining about.

Changing a wheel in the pitch black and driving rain is never pleasant, and it did feel as if this normally quiet road suddenly became a magnet for most of the traffic in Staffordshire.

And why do modern car manufacturers make everything so complicated? At home, I have got a 40-year-old car, with the spare wheel held in place by a nut and bolt. However, in the new car, the spare is held in place by some crane-like contraption featuring a spring-loaded cable and a set of instructions resembling Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Was there really anything wrong with a nut and bolt? If it is a struggle for me, how hard must it be for a distressed old-age pensioner?

And then we come to the wheel-brace. Again, in the not-too-distant past, a wheel-brace was a simple bar with a spanner on the end. Then there are the telescopic ones, which give you a bit more leverage, and that is fine. But this is the first time I have ever seen a self-assembly wheel-brace, in two parts, with yet more unintelligible instructions. Doesn't it say something about the modern world when even a wheel-brace needs assembly instructions?

While struggling to work all this out, a very nice chap called Steve Beard stopped to help. He too was bamboozled by the spare wheel crane, but after a lot of patient studying, he worked it out and the spare was liberated.

The experience taught me a lot about my fellow road users; some also offered to help, others impatiently tweaked their horns. One even complained that Steve's headlights were too bright.

It also taught me that in the quest for ever-greater sophistication, sometimes we solve a problem that never actually existed in the first place.

□ □ □

WHILE I love to hear from readers, it was with great sadness that I read the letter from a gentleman in Stourbridge whose wife had her purse stolen at the check-out of a well-known retailer.

He points out that the thief was clearly caught on CCTV, but nobody was monitoring it.

I can only say that it is very sad that such things go on in our community, and I hope the footage was handed over to police. And if the police are unable to identify the offender, please email me a picture. I'm sure one of our readers might be able to help.



Arun Barua, aged four, gets an early gift at Old Square, Walsall



Santa at Birches Valley Forest Centre, on Cannock Chase



Sleigh boat to China? Well not quite, it's Dudley Caverns

You'd better watch out, Santa's in town

As the momentum gathers for the big Christmas Countdown, **TOM OAKLEY** looks at where we'll find Santa this year

HO! HO! HO! The countdown to Christmas has started which means Father Christmas is busy getting gifts ready for all the boys and girls on his 'nice' list.

Despite this, Santa always makes time in his busy schedule to visit these same children.

You know how the song goes: He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake...

And thankfully he's also conveniently located his grottos across the West Midlands this festive season, so there are plenty of opportunities for you to see the man himself.

In the Black Country, the Dudley Caverns offer something a bit different with their grotto underground. Children are invited to travel by boat along an illuminated journey to see Santa and his elves. There will be carols, hot drinks, mince pies and seasonal entertainment. For details visit www.dudleycanaltrust.org.uk.

Ranging

Elsewhere in the town, families are invited to visit Santa in his grotto set within the Dudley Zoological Gardens. It is open every day up to Christmas from 10am until 3.30pm with prices ranging from £4.50 for children's tickets to £8 for adults.

The Black Country Living Museum is hosting Santa hunts. In Stourbridge, the Bonded Warehouse is offering a boat ride down the canal before visiting Santa's Grotto in the warehouse.

Trips will run on December 17, 18 and 22, with tickets available to book by contacting Heidi Barratt on 01384 395216.

With an allocated time slot to see Santa at the West Midlands Safari Park, you will be greeted by one of his helpful Elves who will



The Bonded Warehouse is all set for their Santa boat trips. Pictured as Santa is David Caunt

show you to the sleigh where you will be magically transported to the North Pole.

While Santa's Grotto is a decorated log cabin with its own Christmas tree, festive fireplace and of course a seat next to Santa himself. It is open everyday up to and including Christmas Eve, with tickets ranging from £5 to £21.

More information is available by visiting www.wmnp.co.uk/santa-safari/

At Sandwell Park Farm you can visit Santa in his grotto, receive a gift and write him a letter as part of Sandwell Council's Christmas in the Valley celebrations.

You will also be given the chance to meet his reindeer and other animals at the farm.

Christmas in the Valley runs until December 24 with extra activities scheduled for weekends.

Sandwell Council's cabinet member for leisure Councillor Richard Marshall said: "This is our first Christmas at the Valley event and

we want to make it a great one for kids and families."

Book online at www.sandwell.gov.uk.

In West Bromwich, a grotto will be at New Square Shopping Centre until Christmas Eve. Entry to the grotto is £5 including a gift from Father Christmas.

Old Square Shopping Centre in Walsall also has a grotto open until Christmas Eve. Opening times are subject to change and residents are asked to keep an eye on the centre's Facebook page.

Continuing his tour of the West Midlands, Santa will also visit Cadbury World to spread chocolate, gifts and Christmas cheer.

The chocolatiers will be working as hard as elves to create a Christmas chocolate masterpiece - last year they made a 3.5ft chocolate Santa.

Visit cadburyworld.co.uk/whats-on/winter for more information on dates and times.



Christmas chocolates at Cadbury World



Visiting Santa at West Midland Safari Park

While he is in Birmingham Santa will also visit the grotto at the Bullring Shopping Centre.

In Staffordshire, people are being urged to bring their family along to Santa's Grotto at Birches Valley.

The Grotto is housed in a beautiful log cabin and set in the picturesque surroundings of Cannock Chase.

Santa's real reindeer can be found close by, grazing in their forest enclosure.

All children who visit Santa will receive their very own real Christmas tree sapling to take home and plant, plus a small gift.

Tickets cost £10 per child and adults have free entry to the Grotto with a paying child.

Children under one-year-old with a paying sibling can go in for free as long as they don't want a gift.

The grotto is open this weekend and next but is closed during the week.

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New £5 note tallow fear is so shallow

I FIND it ridiculous, that the Bank of England is changing the polymer used in the new £5 notes, because of veggie and religious activists.

The Bank of England has said that the amount of tallow in a new £5 note is an extremely small amount, and if one 'does the math', the amount of tallow in a new £5 note is minuscule.

According to the Bank of England, a new £5 note weighs 0.7 grams. The bank said there was a trace of tallow in the new £5 note. A trace chemically means, less than 100 micrograms per gram, or 0.0001 per cent.

A new £5 note weighs 0.7g, therefore there is less than 0.00007 grams or 70 micrograms or 15,000th of a gram of tallow present in one new five.

Even £75,000 worth of new £5 notes would only weigh one gram.

The vegan and vegetarian zealots could breathe in more tallow passing a chip shop.

Also, if you consider, there are now 440 million new £5 notes in circulation. To work out how much tallow will be used in total, in all of these fivers we need to multiply 0.00007grams by 440 million which gives us 30,800g, or

31kg. Therefore, if you get about 40kg of tallow-worthy fat from the average cow, how many cows would you need to make every single new £5 note in circulation?

So, the Bank of England's contractor is bending over backwards, when at present it's only slaughtered some three quarters of a cow, for 440 million new £5 notes.

I wish some people these days get a grip, and not panic all the time over the least thing.

JOE EGGINTON
Wolverhampton

EU saga could spark a civil war

WITH regards to the referendum vote it seems that some people, mainly MPs and people with plenty of money, didn't understand the wording on the ballot paper 'in' or 'out'?

They seem to think 'out' means shake it all about till it suits them.

When they have caused a civil war will these people face going to prison for incitement because that's what is going to happen. It's as plain as the nose on your face.

Out means out of the EU. Make our own laws. No open borders. Get the best trade deal we can with the EU and the rest of the world.

What the MPs think and believe don't matter one iota.

The vote was cast, get behind it before it's too late, open your eyes, and your minds.

J KEMPSON
Coseley

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

Dudley Chronicle,
Chronicle Editorial,
51-53 Queen Street
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL

dudley.chrons@
expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Sorry Surrey but we will still Brexit

ACCORDING to the Lib Dems the Richmond by-election result is proof that support for Brexit is crumbling.

The south-east is a Remain heartland with counties such as Surrey populated largely by the well-off.

If the result proves anything at all it is that the EU benefits the rich.

We know from bitter experience that anything which favours the wealthy almost always comes at a cost to people lower down the pecking order. Joining the EEC was supposed to help protect jobs we were told, but it doesn't work because it can't.

The EU is all about red tape and endless restrictive legislation shackling us hand and foot. Goodbye to all that.

If Europe wants free trade with us that's great, but massive payments to Brussels and open door immigration is too high a price.

We are already talking to the wider world about trade deals and no one can stop that now. Not even the Richmond Lib Dems.

BOB MONTROSE
Sedgley

Purse theft ruins our Christmas

TO all of the shoppers using the Merry Hill Centre – beware.

My wife had her purse stolen from her handbag during a visit to the centre on Friday, December 2.

Thank you to the scum who did this – just before Christmas.

We have to work hard for our money and the only way these morons can get money is to pickpocket people who are looking forward to this festive time of year.

Keep your handbags zipped up and don't leave anything on display.

Don't carry a load of cash, use your cards as those can be cancelled if this happens to you.

It can only take a split second for these thieves to be away with your purse or wallet.

To the thieves I say: thanks for ruining our Christmas.

DAVID POTTER
Brierley Hill

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Mon 26 Dec - Closed	Fri 30 Dec - 9.30am - 6pm	
Tue 27 Dec - 10am - 4pm	Sat 31 Dec - 9.30am - 4.30pm	Tues 3 Jan - 9.30am - 6pm

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Horse so thin 'every bone' in body could be seen

A WOMAN has been banned from keeping horses for 10 years after she admitted riding an ex-racehorse that was so thin that 'every bone in his body' could be seen.

The RSPCA was made aware of the 10-year-old thoroughbred former racehorse called Thor kept at stables in Hyperion Road, Stourton, near Stourbridge, after images of him of the underweight animal were posted on social media.

His owner Charlotte McPherson, aged 22, was disqualified from keeping horses when she appeared at Birmingham Magistrates Court.

A vet's examination of Thor, whose racing name was Hoare Abbey, showed that the cause of his weight loss was because of inadequate care as he had not been wormed properly.

RSPCA inspector Suzi Smith said: "Thor looked incredibly thin and you could see pretty much every bone in his body. It was obvious to anyone who saw him that he was not well.

Sore

"A vet examined Thor and gave him a body condition of zero out of five - he was that thin. While in this body condition, McPherson rode him twice a week."

She had ridden the horse at an even in Blakedown earlier this year, where his condition was noticed by people at the event. Not only was he thin, but he had a sore on his spine, directly underneath the saddle.

"Thor would have been in a lot of pain while he was being ridden," added the inspector.

She explained that the horse had done 'amazingly well' since being found a new home. McPherson was sentenced for two offences of causing unnecessary suffering to the horse by failing to investigate and treat the cause of his poor body condition, and failing to take steps to ensure that the



Above, the emaciated Thor and, below, the horse in well on the way to recovery



needs of the animal were met by failing to protect him from pain, suffering, injury and disease by riding him when he was not in a fit state to be ridden.

McPherson, of Park Lane, Kidder-

minster, was given a 10-year disqualification order, a 12-month community order, 160 hours of unpaid work and an order to pay £300 costs and a £60 victim surcharge. She had pleaded guilty to the offences earlier this year.

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Carer John hits the heights to raise £1,000 for family of cancer victim



Roman Bajerowski, who died at 35

A KIND-HEARTED caregiver completed a thrilling skydive in memory of a much-loved colleague who passed away after a short battle with cancer. John Howell, from Home Instead Senior Care Dudley, took on the adrenaline-fuelled challenge to raise more than £1000 to support the family of Roman Bajerowski.

Roman, who was a father of three, from Tividale, died in February after being diagnosed with lung cancer less than a year before.

Despite recovering from his initial diagnosis, later that year it came back along with skin and bone cancer.

John was supported at Tilstock Airfield on September 2 by Ian and Julie Williams, owners of Home Instead Senior Care Dudley, as well as fellow caregivers.

Diagnosis

After completing the Skydive John, he said: "I can honestly say it was the most exhilarating thing I have ever done and believe it or not, I'm already planning on doing another. Go try it yourselves, it really is magic." John handed the cheque over to the Bajerowski family last week and is continuing to collect in sponsor money from family, friends and work colleagues to support Roman's family.

Justina Bajerowski, who looks after their three children - Natalia, 12, Israel, eight and Laura, two - spoke of



Justina Bajerowski and daughter Laura seen with carer John Howell as he presents a cheque for £1000 after his skydive

her love for Roman. She said: "We never gave up hope. He appeared to be doing well after recovering from his original diagnosis but then we discovered he had cancer on his spine. It was no age at all for us to lose him - he was only 35."

"He was such a wonderful person inside and out. When he fell ill I would go and give him a kiss every night and before he passed away he told me to tell the children that he loved them."

"He absolutely loved his job and the elderly people he visited loved him too as he was passionate about care and really helpful."

"Everyone at Home Instead has been amazing. They are so supportive to me they are like a second family and I'm so thankful for everything they have done for us."

Roman and Justina were originally from Poland, making the move to the Midlands 11 years ago.

Julie Williams, owner of Home Instead, said: "Every one of our caregivers are chosen for their exceptional qualities. Kindness, compassion and a caring nature are qualities that are essential when supporting our clients and John has certainly demonstrated his exceptional qualities."

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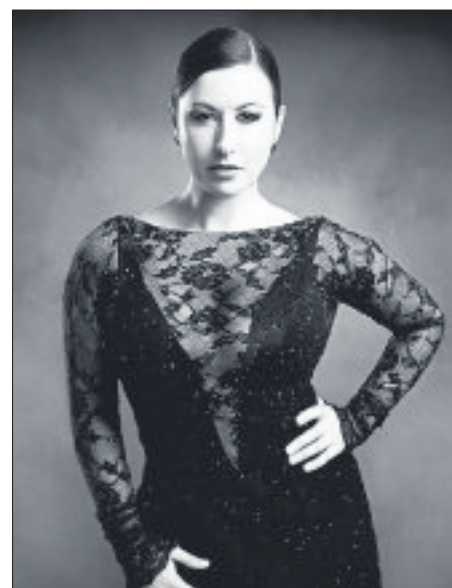
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Mica Paris as Mama Morton



Velma Kelly (Sophie Carmen-Jones) with the chorus of Chicago



Hayley Tamaddon as Roxie Hart



Billy Flynn (John Partridge) with Roxie Hart (Hayley Tamaddon)

Sultry, sexy Chicago!

Chicago, New Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham **THEY'RE giving it the old razzle dazzle at the Alex this year, turning it into a joint where the gin is cold and the piano is hot for the latest revival of ever-popular jazz age musical Chicago.**

The 1920s-set story about femme fatales turned into paparazzi celebrities is a delicious blend of vaudeville, cynical humour and sex appeal.

The dangerous dames of the Cell Block Tango have seldom been more sultry than in this touring production, that takes up residence as an

alternative to panto in the second city until its final performance on New Year's Eve.

The choreography of Bob Fosse sizzles as the scantily clad girls and boys of the chorus slink, slide and stretch in the most provocative dance routines this side of Cabaret, that other Kander and Ebb classic.

But can soap stars cut it in the major roles? The answer is a resounding yes. Hayley Tamaddon, best known for roles in Emmerdale, Coronation Street, and her skating exploits, is a real song and dance woman with a nice edge of quirky humour as Roxie Hart. What she lacks in stature to Sophie Carmen-Jones's high-kicking Velma Kelly, she more than makes up for in chutzpah.

Former EastEnders John Partridge brings a

manic hint of menace to the role of supersmooth shyster lawyer Billy Flynn, whilst Mica Paris brings soul power to the role of Mama Morton, prison fixer and 'countess of the clink'.

Strong support comes from Neil Ditt as the hapless Amos Hart - his Mister Cellophane number is excellent - and A D Richardson as the alarmingly pseudo-operative rose-tinted columnist Mary Sunshine. Having a jazz band on stage as part of the action adds to this production's kinetic energy.

The first night audience on Monday loved it. Chicago is a sure bet for satisfaction if you're looking for a grown-up showbiz spectacular, and all that jazz, this festive season.

Leon Burakowski



A scene from Billy Flynn's big number All I Care About

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Pensioner's death in fishing lake was suicide

Raiders hit centre again



Peter Scott with a pile of items that were ruined when raiders vandalised and stole from the support centre in Stourbridge

THIEVES returned to steal another vehicle from a Stourbridge centre that supports people with learning disabilities – just days after raiders went on a wrecking spree and stole two cars.

Burglars targeted Pinnacle Supports in Hayes Lane on December 3, stealing two cars – one was involved in an accident and the other also dumped later – and computers, Christmas presents and money raised for charity.

Just two days later, on the Monday afternoon, they were targeted again when a wheelchair accessible

car was stolen from the centre compound on the site at about 5pm.

Company director Peter Scott, from Halesowen, said: "These people are evil. The car stolen was another wheelchair accommodating vehicle. This just makes it even harder for us after the break-in on Saturday.

"We had 11 cars in total and now we have eight. The car stolen cost £14,000. We are taking cars off site but it is a real danger now that they could strike again.

"We are stretched to our absolute limit now."

A MISSING pensioner whose body was found in a fishing pool had killed himself, an inquest heard.

A church warden and popular member of the local community, William Jewkes, aged 75, was found in the pool at Parkes Hall Road in Dudley on November 25 by a man walking his dog. Mr Jewkes, who was found at the location just a mile away from his home in Sedgley, was wearing a rucksack filled with roof tiles.

Black Country Coroner's Court in Oldbury was told his family had become concerned after Mr Jewkes, who was a warden at Upper Gornal Methodist Church, disappeared from the home he shared with his son, Matthew, on November 22.

Better known as Bill, Mr Jewkes had left his car keys, watch and mobile phone at his home on Tipton Road. Police were alerted to his disappearance that day.

Mr Jewkes had last been seen at the church when he opened the building for a mother and toddlers' group on the morning of November 22.

Worried

A woman at the group said he had not said goodbye before he left, which he had never failed to do before.

Friends had described their 'upset and disbelief that he could take his own life'.

The coroner heard that Mr Jewkes had been worried about a future knee operation but was given the medical all clear just a day before he disappeared after he suffered a seizure earlier this year.

In evidence to senior Black Country coroner Zafar Siddique, Mr Jewkes was described as a 'keen member of the community' and a committed Christian.

Police discovered searches on the widower's laptop looking for information on poisons on July 21.

Giving his condolences to the family in an 'absolutely tragic set of circumstances', Mr Siddique ruled Mr Jewkes' cause of death was suicide.

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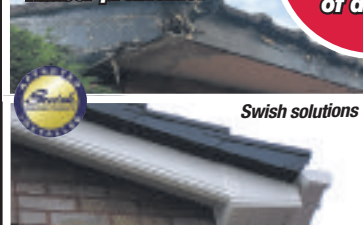


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Champions Church in appeal for funds



Worship pastor Adam Nash, of Netherton, and, right, youth pastor Caleb Burchell, of Dudley, at Champions Church

A CHURCH is fundraising for an ambitious £2 million expansion plan, which will see the creation of a pre-school, auditorium, coffee shop and offices.

Champions Church in Netherton is entering the next phase of its multi-million pound development. It follows the opening, nearly seven years ago, of its £3 million complex, capable of seating up to 900 people.

Last year it received planning permission for phases two and three, which will enable it to add to the Cinder Bank site a purpose-built pre-school, a children and youth auditorium, coffee shop, extended lobby area, offices, bookshop, conference rooms, terrace and more car parking.

Senior pastor for 27 years, Mark Burchell, said: "This is very much a place for the whole community, from the homeless people we help to the businesses we work with to provide services. It's what we like to call a home for everybody."

Among the community services the church provides is a weekly soup kitchen every Tuesday at the chapel, and a store that sells clothing and other items as well as providing an ironing service.

It is hoped that with these additional facilities the church will be able to build even further on its community support.

A key part of the latest stage of the project is the range of new facilities for youngsters, including the pre-school.

Mr Burchell said: "It is purpose-built with six classrooms, and there will be a children and youth auditorium. It will have space for 250 youngsters."

The congregation need to raise a further £500,000 to begin the next phase. If this money is secured, they could begin building the extension as early as March.

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FIVE MINUTES FROM MERRY HILL

Support for work at theatre

DUDLEY Council's regeneration chief has hailed a new era reviving one of the town centre's best known venues after the council handed over keys to campaigners.

Councillor Khurshid Ahmed, said: "Black Country Hippodrome Ltd has been working behind the scenes to attract new funding to help reopen the building on Castle Hill.

We are delighted to be supporting them with their bid to do this, and that will continue as long as they are making progress and meeting the agreed series of milestones set out in the lease.

"The council bought the building in 2010 and considered a number of proposals to reuse it but following in-depth assessments from independent consultants none of them were found to be viable."

30 new jobs at Castle View

A NEW 160-seater restaurant has created 30 jobs in Dudley town centre.

The Castle View, part of the Hungry Horse chain owned by Greene King, has opened on Castle Gate drive, near Dudley Zoo. Giles Carless, general manager, said: "We're incredibly excited to be opening a new Hungry Horse pub in Dudley."

The restaurant includes TVs in dining booths and will have live entertainment.

FOCUS ON DUDLEY TOWN CENTRE

£12m builders' college is due to open in the spring

DUDLEY College's £12 million state-of-the-art building, where the next generation of builders will be taught, is taking shape.

The Advance II centre is due to open in the spring and will be the first college of its kind specialising in the latest construction techniques, technology and off-site fabrication.

The towering steel-frame structure in Priory Road has had most of its ground-work completed. Builders are working inside with progress being shown via an online webcam.

Dudley North MP Ian Austin said: "It's brilliant to see the new Advance II, the college's new Centre for Advanced Building Technologies being built.

"It will be the first college in the training of students in the latest state-of-the-art construction techniques and technologies.

Students

"I've worked hard to support Lowell Williams and his brilliant work at Dudley College which has transformed the town with fantastic new facilities, bringing thousands of students to Dudley, boosting the town centre and strengthening our economy.

"The only way we'll attract new investment and new jobs to replace the ones

Report By Clare Butler

we've lost is by having the skills new industries need."

The new 37,000 sq ft building is alongside the £9m Dudley Advance building that opened last year.

The new centre will include workshops, classrooms and support facilities around a four-storey building called The Hanger.

There will also be a 'digital centre' in which Building Information Modelling (BIM) and other software packages will be demonstrated and taught. Other facilities include a 'carbon-friendly technology centre' where students will learn how to install air source heat pumps and photovoltaic technologies.

A Dudley College spokesman said the centre was part of 'the changing face of construction'.



Dudley College's £12 million state-of-the-art construction building, Advanced II – the first of its kind – takes shape

Free parking trial for six months

A FREE parking scheme will be held at a Dudley town centre car park to attract more shoppers.

Two hours of free parking will be offered on Dudley Council's Flood Street car park and the measure could be made permanent if the six-month trial proves a success.

The UKIP motion was passed at a meeting of the full council.

Councillor Paul Brothwood, leader of the UKIP group in Dudley, said: "I am pleased another UKIP motion was agreed unanimously."

"We have worked with residents and businesses to see which cost-effective solution would help create a catalyst for our borough town centres."

"With our free parking motion in place it will provide a trial period to implement it with little revenue loss to the council."

Delighted to be given sack

ANIMALS at Dudley Zoo are full of beans thanks to dozens of hessian sack donated by a coffee firm.

Lincoln & York, based in North Lincolnshire, donated a huge box of empty coffee bean sacks after they were contacted by senior keeper Jodie Dryden, who reckoned the zoo could use the old sacks. They have already been put to as bedding and stuffed with treats for use by tigers, orang utans, lions, meerkats, otters and lynx.

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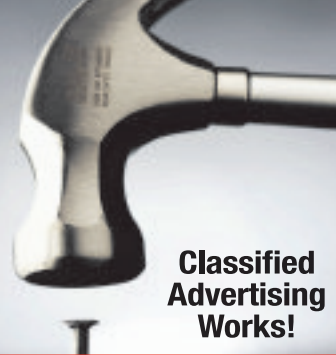
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Queen Square, Wolverhampton, around



Dudley Zoo's bear pit and viewing platform in 1930



Waiting anxiously for news after the Hamstead pit disaster 1908



A bustling Dudley Street, Wolverhampton, around 1900



Smethwick's Chance Glassworks around 1920

Chronicling the birth of the Black Country

BLASTS of hot air billowed from furnaces while the streets rang out with the pounding of great steam hammers and the shriek of whistling boilers.

This was the Black Country at the height of Victoria's reign and beyond as the rapid rise in manufacturing exploded across the face of England.

Between 1820 and 1914, Britain was transformed on a scale unprecedented in its history. By the start of the First World War, it was a staggeringly wealthy country.

A century earlier, England was a very different place, with little over a third of its population living in towns and cities. By the outbreak of war, industrialisation had seen that number soar to almost 80 per cent. A new book, *The Lost Country*, has recorded the changing face of England over six tumultuous decades from 1870 to 1930 in images from national archives.

A crowded Dudley Street in Wolverhampton taken around 1900 shows a

MEMORY LANE

By Marion Brennan

prosperous town with shops offering factory-produced consumer items. Freeman Hardy & Willis, on the right of the picture, was opening its chain of shoe shops at the time.

A horse and carriage stands outside the 16th century Star & Garter Hotel in Victoria Street where Charles I allegedly took shelter on the march to Edge Hill, hence the 'Royal' reference. The historic inn was sold and demolished in 1904.

A picture of Queen Square with St Peter's church in the background shows a woman pushing a pram as she walks through a bustling market place. The book also features an image of the zoo's bear pit and viewing platform, which were considered innovative and modernist for the time.

Workers are seen at machines in two pictures taken inside the Beans factory, Dudley. In 1907 George Bean became chairman of the company which had been founded by Absalom

Harper in 1822. Originally a supplier of car parts, during the Great War the company made aero engines, shrapnel and shell cases for the Government. After the war, the firm manufactured the Bean Motor Car.

A photograph taken around 1920 shows Chance Glassworks in Spon Lane South, Smethwick, which produced the window glass for the Houses of Parliament.

In darker scene, an image captures families at the pithead of Hamstead Colliery, Great Barr, in 1908, as they waited for news of victims of a mining disaster. The deep veins of coal were mined with some risk, as was proven when a fire broke out underground and 26 men died from inhaling poisonous fumes.

One of the earliest photos features Bilston Town Hall in Lichfield Street in around 1880. The building reflected the growth of the status of the town from a village on the outskirts of Wolverhampton to a burgeoning coal mining area and later a centre for steel production.

* *Lost England*, price £45, by Philip Davies is published by Atlantic.



Bilston Town Hall, Lichfield Street, circa 1880



Young boys working at the die shop at Beans, Dudley, 1915

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If your turkey's frozen, make sure it has time to fully defrost



Cooking your turkey in advance could give you more time – for festive table decorations

Make your turkey a real Christmas Day cracker

By Sophie Madden

FOR many people the traditional Christmas lunch is one of the most eagerly anticipated parts of the big day.

And it's easy to see why; a beautiful golden roast turkey with all the trimmings is a sight to treasure.

But if you want to make it taste as good as it looks and avoid getting into a flap on Christmas morning just follow the British Turkey Information Service's tips for success:

1. Choose a British bird with the Quality British Turkey logo alongside the familiar Red Tractor. This ensures high standards in animal welfare, food safety and traceability.

2. If you are not sure what size to buy, visit www.britishturkey.co.uk and check the size guide. And if you need a large turkey check your oven dimensions first!

3. Calculate the defrosting and cooking times well in advance so you can allow plenty of time – some turkeys may take a few days to fully defrost.

If you are going to stuff the neck end you must weigh it after stuffing to get the correct cooking time.

Text the word "Turkey" followed by the weight of your turkey in kilos to '64446' for a text back with the cooking times and the number of people it will feed.

4. Allow your cooked turkey to rest for 20-30 minutes after cooking to make keep it juicy and make it easier to carve. TV Chef Phil Vickery shows you how on his carving web film on www.britishturkey.co.uk

5. And for any other turkey advice simply call the friendly team on the British Turkey helpline on 0800 783 9994! The lines are open weekdays 9am-5pm and including Christmas Eve.

6. Online Live Chat is available until December 24. Just visit www.britishturkey.co.uk to get expert advice there and then this Christmas.

Cooking

These are the industry's tried and tested cooking times, but always test the juices run clear to ensure it is cooked.

- Under 4kg allow 20 minutes per kg + 70 minutes.
- Over 4kg allow 20 minutes per kg + 90 minutes.

Weigh the turkey after stuffing to calculate cooking time and remember oven temperatures vary. Cook at 180°C Fan/ 375°F / Gas Mark 5.

Cover loosely with foil and remove foil for last 40 minutes for browning.

More turkey tips

Have you thought about cooking your turkey in advance?

This could save you getting stressed on the day and give you more precious time with your family.

It also helps save valuable fridge space for other foods. Once your turkey is cooked



Text the word "Turkey" followed by the weight of your turkey in kilos to '64446' for a text back with the cooking times



Turkey with all the trimmings make a perfect Christmas meal

and cooled you can slice then batch it into portions and store it in the freezer.

Freezing it in portions will enable you to take out what you need when you need it, and you can save the remaining turkey in the freezer for a later date, perhaps for a New Year's Eve buffet. Just remember that meat previously cooked and frozen should only be reheated once.

If your turkey is frozen and you prefer to roast it on Christmas day, make sure you check the guidance well in advance to de-

frost it according to its size – a typical large turkey weighing 6-7kg could take three days to fully thaw in the fridge.

Always defrost your frozen turkey fully before cooking – partially defrosted turkey may not cook evenly – which means that harmful bacteria could survive the cooking process.

To avoid cross-contamination always put the turkey into a container large enough to catch the defrosted drips.

Get the most out of you turkey by using



Think about portions to help cut down on waste

any juices to make a stock and leftovers to make a soup <http://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/node/1309>

You can even freeze turkey, other meat and meals cooked from previously cooked and frozen meat. But once defrosted, the pause button is off and you should eat the food within 24 hours. So you can turn your leftover Christmas dinner into a tasty meal for another day. Turkey is so versatile and tasty, just make sure you don't eat it only once a year!

Simple but satisfying supper and sweet treat

TRY something simple but satisfying in the run-up to your Christmas Day feast:

SAUSAGE SUPPER

Ingredients (serves 4-6)

- 2tbsp olive oil
- 2 large onions, sliced into wedges
- 2 red peppers cut into large dice
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 tbsp chopped thyme leaves
- 500g baby new potatoes, unpeeled and halved
- 12 sausages, pricked with a fork
- 200ml white wine
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 220C/200C fan/Gas 7.
2. Place all the ingredients except the wine in a large, resealable freezer bag. Seal the bag shut and shake well to coat everything in the oil. Alternatively, put everything in a large bowl and turn the ingredients until they are fully coated in the oil. Tip into a large roasting tin, spreading the ingredients out into one even layer and ensuring that the sausages aren't covered by any of the vegetables. Season well with salt and pepper.
3. Roast for about 30-35 minutes until golden, then remove from the oven, turn the sausages over and toss the vegetables in the cooking juices. Pour in the wine and return to the oven for a further 20 minutes, or until browned and the sausages are cooked and the potatoes tender. Serve hot with a dollop of mustard on the side.



Recipe from Absolute Favourites by Mary Berry published by BBC Books, priced £25.

Peach & Creme Fraiche Cake

Ingredients (serves 12-16)

- For the cake
 - 450g self-raising flour
 - 2tsp baking powder
 - 200g butter, plus extra for greasing
 - 350g demerara sugar
 - 6 eggs
 - 150g crème fraîche
 - 25ml peach schnapps or peach juice
- 100ml peach puree
- 7 peaches, halved and stoned, or 2 x 400g tins peach halves, drained
- For the crumble
 - 60g plain flour
 - 1/2tsp ground cinnamon
 - 30g butter, diced
 - 30g demerara sugar
- For the topping
 - 100g crème fraîche
 - 100g cream cheese
 - 50ml double cream



Method

1. Preheat the oven to 150C/Gas 1 and grease and line a 24cm high-sided, loose-bottomed cake tin.
2. To make the cake, place the flour, baking powder and butter in a bowl and rub together to form a breadcrumb-like texture. Stir in the sugar.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk the eggs, crème fraîche, peach schnapps or juice, and puree together, then pour onto the dry mixture and mix to a thick batter.
4. Pour half into the prepared tin and tap the tin gently to settle the batter. Place the peach halves, cut-side up, onto the batter in concentric circles, then top with the remaining batter, smoothing over the top.
5. Bake in the centre of the oven for one-and-three-quarter hours until golden and risen. A skewer inserted into the centre of the cake should come out clean – if it doesn't, return the cake to the oven for a further five minutes and repeat. Leave the cake in the tin to cool completely.
6. While the cake cools, make the crumble to go on top. Turn the oven up to 180C/Gas 4. Place the flour, ground cinnamon and butter in a bowl and rub until the mix resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add the sugar and stir to combine. Spread out over a baking sheet and bake for six to eight minutes until golden brown and crispy. Set aside to cool on the baking sheet.
7. For the topping, whisk the crème fraîche, cream cheese and double cream together, then spread over the cake while it's still in the tin – this will give you a neat finish. Scatter the crumble over the top to cover the cream, then ease the cake out from the tin.

Recipe from Sweet by James Martin published by Quadrille, priced £20.

Go natural for simple but stylish decorations

As artistic gardeners gather sprigs, clusters of berries and seedheads to make festive decorations, Hannah Stephenson learns how to make some simple indoor displays this Christmas

THERE are so many bits and pieces from the garden you can use to make festive decorations, from Christmas tree clippings as a base for traditional wreaths, to variegated holly with berries, crab apples, poppy seed-heads, euonymus and cones.

"Making your own organic Christmas decorations won't cost a fortune and is a lovely way to spend some festive family fun time together," says plant grower Mike Kitchen, Rocket Gardens plant nursery founder.

His step-by-step guide shows you how to make natural-looking decorations in minutes:

FESTIVE CANDLES

You will need:

- :: Candle
- :: Holly
- :: Red berries
- :: Hessian material
- :: Gardening twine
- :: Glue gun or safety pins
- :: Scissors

Step by step:

1. Cut a strip of hessian to fit around your candle and attach it together at the back with a glue gun or safety pin.
2. Wrap the gardening twine around the hessian and tie into a pretty bow at the front.
3. Take your foliage and tuck in behind your bow. You could also create a small foliage arrangement, bunched together with floristry wire and tuck this in behind your bow to spruce up your candle further.

ROSEMARY SNOWFLAKES

You will need:

- :: 4 sprigs of Rosemary (all measuring roughly the same length)
- :: Gardening twine
- :: Floristry wire
- :: Scissors

Step by step:

1. Using two sprigs of rosemary each time, place the sprigs together to form a cross shape.
2. Use the floristry wire to bind the two sprigs of rosemary together in the centre of each cross.



3. Place two crosses together and form a snowflake shape.

4. Using floristry wire, bind the two crosses together in the centre.

Want to create a set of snowflakes? Cut your sets of four sprigs of rosemary into varying sizes to create different sized snowflakes.

Use gardening twine and tie to one of the sprigs on the snowflake and then you will be able to hang your snowflakes in your window, fireplace, staircase or on your Christmas tree.

You could also make a pine cone star by gluing the base of five cones to form a star shape, wrapping raffia around it, between the cones, leaving enough to make a loop from which to hang the star, and add holly sprigs and berries to the centre with floristry wire or glue.

NATURAL PLACE SETTINGS

You will need:

- :: Stem of bay, stem of holly and a couple of sprigs of rosemary
- :: Floristry wire
- :: Gardening twine
- :: Scissors

Step by step:

1. Select a stem of bay, a stem of holly and a couple of sprigs of rosemary
2. Cut them to size.
3. Arrange them how you want them to look when bunched together. Keep the foliage facing forwards.
4. With floristry wire, bind the bunch of foliage together.

5. Go over this wire by wrapping the twine over the top and forming a pretty bow at the front. You can completely cover the stems with the twine or leave some showing, it's up to you.

Attach a personalised tag to each one and use them as place settings for your Christmas dinner table.

Competition winner

THE winner of our £100 National Garden Gift Voucher prize is Tom Hopwood, from Hodnet. Congratulations Tom!



Timus Viburnum is easy to grow and produces berries in the spring

Evergreen shrub carries beautiful bead-like fruits

BEST OF THE BUNCH – Viburnum davidii

THE beautiful, metallic-looking blue bead-like fruits make this variety of evergreen viburnum worth growing.

They follow flattened heads of white spring flowers, while at other times of year, the dramatic dark green leaves provide a brilliant foil for other plants. Viburnums are reliable and easy to grow, but if you want the blue berries from this type, you'll need to plant both sexes, as it's only the female forms which produce the berries. This medium-sized shrub grows to 1.5m (5ft).

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

- :: Cover perennial borders with a mulch of compost or other organic material to stop frost penetrating the soil.
- :: Take hardwood cuttings of dogwood, roses and spiraea.
- :: Finish planting spring-flowering bulbs.
- :: Cut down late-flowering perennials such as phlox to ground level.
- :: Perk up your patio pots with ornamental cabbages for a burst of colour.

- :: Lift and store some root crops, keeping them close to the kitchen, so you don't have to venture outside to harvest them in really cold or wet weather.

- :: Empty spent crops on to the compost heap.
- :: Bring mint, parsley and other potted herbs under cover.

- :: Sow sweet peas in deep pots.
- :: Clean feeders and bird baths to prevent disease spreading among garden birds.

GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT – Mung beans

GROWN as beansprouts, mung beans can be added to winter salads, soups and stir-fries. They are so easy and quick to grow.

All you need is a jam jar and the seeds, which should be soaked for an hour in tepid water then rinsed. Place them in a screw-top jar and cover it with a piece of cotton or muslin secured with an elastic band. Place the jar in a warm place such as an airing cupboard or on a windowsill which is kept at a comfortable room temperature. The sprouting seeds should be rinsed two or three times a day. Mung beans take three to five days to reach around 2.5cm long and can be used.

ROSS UNDERWOOD

Head Gardener at Hodnet Hall



WITHOUT wishing to mention the big guy in the red suit, I am sure that not even us gardeners cannot escape entirely from the tinsel and turkey.

If you are wondering what to buy the gardener in your life (especially if that is you), then why not have a little treat. What better than something to perk up the view from the window in the drab days of winter. With a little thought and planning the winter garden can be as alive as any garden in summer.

Many winter flowering shrubs have small sweetly scented flowers – why not create a small scented winter garden using Viburnum, Hamamelis, Sarcococca and contrast them with the red winter stems of dogwood.

Viburnum x bodnantense "Dawn" is a hardy shrub reaching two or three metres tall. It is a wonderful winter flowering shrub with produces clusters of tubular, pinkish flowers which are sweetly scented along the bare branches. The flowers open off and on from November to February and the shrub will survive in any reasonable soil in a sunny or partially shaded site. Admittedly, this shrub is no beauty queen for the rest of the year having rather plain foliage so be sure not to place it in the most prominent position but in the background from where it can emerge to take centre stage.

My next choice might seem a little controversial but Viburnum tinus is a useful and deservedly popular evergreen and one of the most widely grown winter flowering shrubs. It is bone hardy growing between three and ten feet and sports a fine dense glossy coat of evergreen foliage.

Flowering starts in late autumn and continues right through the winter when the small white flowers are replaced by blue berries. It performs better in a sunny spot but it will take some shade. I find that it is more attractive when kept lightly trimmed and not let grow as tall as it would like. It does make an excellent ground cover as it bushes out.

Visitors walking around our garden often suddenly and unexpectedly come across the rather spicy scent of Sarcococca otherwise known as Christmas Box. Not for nothing has this popular evergreen been given this common name. It's small glossy leaves are reminiscent of box and in the summer you might have walked past it. In winter it flaunts small white flowers which are guaranteed to capture your attention especially if you are walking past. It is also a useful shrub for those troublesome spots in dry shade.

Hamamelis are garden royalty. When all else is frozen, one old faithful in winter/early spring is the Hamamelis with its frost-resistant flowers. The curious spidery or string-like ribbons of yellow, orange or



Striking Mahonias have spires of golden yellow fragrant flowers from November through to March



Viburnum Dawn is a hardy shrub that flowers during winter

red petals are held on bare branches, and most yellow forms are scented. The actual flowers are rather insignificant. Those cultivars of H. mollis, the Chinese Witch-Hazel have the best scent in my opinion and a richer colour.

One of the most popular cultivars is a hybrid known as "Pallida" which has clear yellow petals and is extremely reliable. The more or less oval, ribbed leaves of Hamamelis often turn to fine oranges and yellows in autumn.

Hamamelis need moist well-drained soil in sun or part shade, with some wind shel-

ter. Watch out for suckers from the root-stock and remove these. In mild winters, they can open as early as November, but typically by January to February they are at their peak.

Mahonias are striking statuesque shrubs with evergreen holly-like leaves with sharply toothed edges. They have spires of golden yellow fragrant flowers from November to March. The new growth is flushed purplish red and cultivars such as "Hivernant" can take on fiery foliage colours. Mahonias are extremely useful for the evergreen winter foliage and flowers



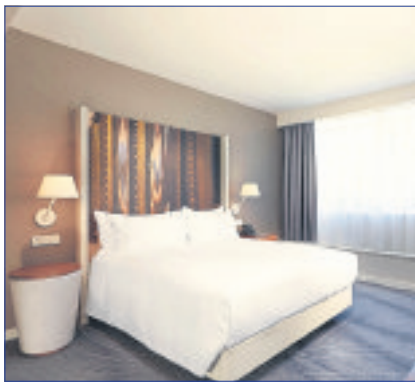
Hamamelis are 'garden royalty' with frost-resistant flowers

and they will often thrive in less than ideal conditions.

Skimmias are very popular winter interest evergreens, mound-forming, and good in containers. They like moist but well-drained acidic soil, and in the garden, grow best in some shade. The most popular are males with masses of tiny flowers. Both male and female varieties are required for the red or yellow berries, except in the case of the self-fertile S. reevesiana. For good berrying in the garden best to plant a mix of several varieties. So go on whether you've been naughty or nice, treat yourself.



Old Town on a winter morning in Wroclaw, Poland



Rest up – a bedroom at the Doubletree



Hotel heaven – the Doubletree, Wroclaw

Cultural city with so many intriguing sights

IT'S a tricky city to pronounce, presuming you've even heard of it, but once you've nailed its name, Wroclaw (pronounced Vrots-Vaaff) in southwest Poland, it's easy enough to visit, especially for a short break.

It's less than a two-hour flight from the UK, served direct by budget airlines (airports include Luton, Bristol and Liverpool) and is remarkably good value, with a pint of beer or a cappuccino costing just over £1 each.

Wroclaw, presently European Capital of Culture, is itself the capital of the province of Lower Silesia. It's made up of 12 islands, connected by more than 130 bridges and plenty of cycle paths.

I hire a bike from my hotel, the new Doubletree by Hilton, a striking, elliptical building close to the Old Town, and cut through the leafy Slowacki Park to the ivy-covered National Museum overlooking the river Oder.

The museum's home to Silesian paintings, silverware and ceramics, but keen to enjoy the mild autumnal weather, I cycle on, passing pleasure boats, cafes and families out for a stroll.

I pick a bridge – which happens to be Most Piaskowy (Sand Bridge), the oldest in Wroclaw – cross over and find myself on Ostrow Tumski (cathedral island), known for its religious buildings, dominated by the twin spires of Wroclaw Cathedral. Stone statues of lions flank the entrance.

One is almost worn away; the other is largely intact. I learn later that the former was the statue women would touch if they wanted to be married within a year. The other was for would-be grooms.

I bump over the island's cobbled streets to Tumski Bridge, where romance rears its head again; the bridge's railings are covered in padlocks attached by couples keen to demonstrate everlasting love, by tossing the keys into the river.

Back in the Old Town, I join a walking tour, beginning at The Rynek, a pedestri-

HOLIDAYS

By Karen Bowerman

anised market square, lined with gabled houses with decorative facades and open-air cafes selling traditional Zywiec beer.

Our group's guide, Michal Filarowski, explains the city was largely destroyed during the Second World War, and that none of the medieval-style buildings are original.

As we wander around, I spot two of the city's quirkiest tourist attractions: a couple of bronze dwarfs.

The mischief makers are a nod to the Orange Alternative, an anti-communist movement that used nonsensical slogans to ridicule the regime in the Eighties.

When the authorities painted over anti-government graffiti, the movement painted dwarfs instead.

Papa Krasnal (Papa dwarf), an official monument to the movement, was erected decades later. Soon afterwards, businesses, noting Papa's popularity, created specialist dwarfs of their own.

You'll now find dwarf beauticians, butchers and bakers. I even meet a bespectacled fellow dressed in a striped scarf at the university gates.

I finish with a coffee in the city's indoor market.

Its vaulted ceiling is said to have inspired Wroclaw's architectural landmark, the domed 20th century Centennial Hall.

I sit surrounded by fruit, vegetables and massive displays of flowers. But I'm most intrigued by the mushrooms, collected from forests across Lower Silesia.

One stallholder talks me through his offering; there are kurki, borowiki, podgrzybki and prawdziwki – all delicious, but utterly unpronounceable, of course!

● **Doubletree by Hilton opened its doors in August. There are 189 rooms, many overlooking the city's Slowacki Park. Standard doubles cost from £79 per night including breakfast when booking direct at www.wroclaw.doubletree.com**



Pole position – attractive buildings fronting Medieval Solny Square in The Rynek

Dog-lovers can take a break with their pooch



Visit Tewkesbury Park with your four-legged friend

SET in 163 acres of majestic parkland, commanding views of the Cotswolds countryside and beyond, Tewkesbury Park has the perfect backdrop for dogs to accompany their owners for a well-earned break.

Undulating grounds mean dogs are in doggie heaven. With this in mind, the team at the hotel have created a new Canine Retreat Experience, ideal for guests who don't wish to leave their trusty friend in a kennel.

Priced at £199, the Canine Retreat includes:

- A welcome pack in a dog-friendly room with doggie treats, a luxury Hunt & Wilson dog bed, suggested walks and tailored information
- Traditional afternoon tea
- Three-course dinner for two in the Piano Lounge, along with a "Dog's Dinner" prepared by chef for the pampered pooch
- £25 spa gift voucher (per room)
- Overnight accommodation with full use of all the leisure facilities
- Full English breakfast and dogs will receive a sausage or two

All dog-friendly rooms have patio doors, opening directly onto the hotel's grounds, with dog bins placed directly outside the room – perfect for any mid-night toilet emergencies!

Leisure

Tewkesbury Park recently completed an extensive two-year renovation at a cost of £4 million, with the brand new addition of nine luxury historic suites, two new spa rooms, two meeting rooms, an orangery and a cocktail lounge.

The main foyer, reception, communal areas and guestrooms have been completely refurbished.

Tewkesbury Park's leisure facilities include an 18-hole par 73 parkland golf course and academy course, as well as an extensive Leisure Club with a swimming pool, gym, squash and tennis courts, sauna and steam room.

Tewkesbury Park is only five minutes from M5 junction nine, on the doorstep of Tewkesbury and within easy reach of Cheltenham, Gloucester and Worcester.

For information and reservations, please call 01684 295 405, or email reservations@tewkesburypark.co.uk, or visit www.tewkesburypark.co.uk

Meanwhile, The Kennel Club, the UK's largest dog welfare organisation, has launched a new free online service that will enable dog lovers to find a range of shows and dog events in their area, including breed specific shows, agility, heelwork to music, rally and obedience, using a simple postcode search or breed search to find events featuring specific breeds of dog.

The Find a Dog Show service is available at www.findadogshow.org.uk or www.thekennelclub.org.uk



In a spin over Christmas shopping? Snap up a park pass



Fun for all ages at Drayton Manor Theme Park

THOSE struggling to find the perfect Christmas present need look no further as Drayton Manor Park's 2017 Season Pass is now available to purchase online.

It's the gift that keeps on giving because with a Drayton Manor Season Pass or Season Pass Plus you can create a year to remember and experience the fun, thrills and delights all year round for just a fraction of the price. Plus be the first to know of the latest events, competitions and offers throughout the year.

The 2017 Season Pass costs £70 for those aged 4+ and £40 for those aged 2-3 years and provides unlimited access to the park from March 30 to October 27.

The Season Pass Plus costs £100 aged 4+ and £55 for those aged 2-3

years and provides unlimited access to the park from March 30, 2017, to February 26, 2018, including February half term 2018.

It also provides access to the hugely popular Firework Spectacular weekend and unlimited access to the award winning Magical Christmas event with one Father Christmas experience per season pass holder.

Both passes offer 20 per cent off in all park catering and retail outlets, 20 per cent off at the Grill Inn and hotel restaurants plus friends and family offers throughout the season and access to exclusive competitions, news, events and offers.

To book or for more information about the park, visit www.draytonmanor.co.uk or call 0844 472 1950.

For regular updates and news

about Drayton Manor Park, join it on Twitter www.twitter.com/Draytonmanor and Facebook www.facebook.com/DraytonManorPark

Season passes are subject to availability. Access is not available on park buyout days or days that the park is closed (season pass holders will be notified via email of any dates but please check the website for full list of opening times and dates).

The park will be closed to the public on specific dates, please see website for details. Prices only valid if purchased before December 24.

Pre-booking is essential for some events, subject to availability. For more information visit: www.draytonmanor.co.uk/tickets-and-prices/seasonpass

New titles to educate and adorn coffee tables

THINKING of buying your loved one a gardening book for Christmas? Hannah Stephenson leafs through a flurry of new titles ranging from coffee table tomes to practical guides and reference stalwarts.

AS winter beckons and thoughts of the festive season are upon us, now is a good time to plan new beds and borders, find inspiring ideas for your garden and work out how you want your garden to look next year.

Gardening books provide a wealth of inspiration - so whether you're looking for a gift to put under the tree or simply want to examine a new or traditional garden style yourself, here are a few of the books which should get the green-fingered creative juices flowing...

:: Thenford: The Creation Of An English Garden

By Michael and Anne Heseltine (Head of Zeus, £40): This coffee table tome tells the story in words and pictures of Michael and Anne Heseltine's Northamptonshire home, charting the development of the garden over 40 years. It started off as an overgrown woodland, but today there's an arboretum with more than 3,000 varieties of trees and shrubs, medieval fish ponds, a rill water feature and a beautifully restored walled garden.



:: RHS A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants

Edited by Christopher Brickell (DK, £75): This is a Christmas gift to end all Christmas gifts for gardeners, a beautiful reference tool packed with fantastic images and clear descriptions and growing advice for more than 15,000 plants. It's been updated with more than 5,000 new plant entries and new photographs and comes in a majestic presentation box.

:: House Of Plants: Living With Succulents, Air Plants And Cacti

By Caro Langton and Rose Ray (Frances Lincoln, £20): If you love indoor greenery with the minimum of fuss, this book focuses on houseplants that are perfect for urban living, showing both the aspiring and experienced plant enthusiast how to nurture, share and enjoy them, as well as arranging them stylishly in the home.

:: The Quest For Shakespeare's Garden

By Roy Strong (Thames & Hudson, £14.95): Published in association with Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Sir Roy Strong's lively account traces the origins of the Elizabethan garden and tells the story of the Bard's own garden. Accompanied by quotations from Shakespeare's works, it features beautiful illustrations of his gardens, past and present.



:: Gardenista: The Definitive Guide To Stylish Outdoor Spaces

By Michelle Slatalla with the editors of Gardenista (Artisan, £28.99): Full page pictures illustrate the terrific ideas offered by this first book from the team behind Gardenista.com. With more than 1.1 million visitors a month, Gardenista has become one of the online destination source books for garden and exterior design fans. It features tours of 12 outdoor spaces including a fairy-tale garden, a cottage garden and a posh and pampered greenhouse.

:: Plant Love: The Scandalous Truth About The Sex Life Of Plants

By Michael Allaby (Flibert Press, £14.99): Want to know about botanic sex? Find out in this revealing stocking-filler, an expose of more than 200 of nature's most unseemly liaisons. There's nectar and pollen, but there are also teasers which deliver nothing and cheating among plants takes many forms. Find out how avocado flowers are female one day and male the next, how the violet really does shrink and how giraffes pollinate certain trees.

:: Garden Flora

By Noel Kingsbury (Timber Press, £29.99): Did you know that epimediums contain a compound similar to that which you find in Viagra? Or that ancient armies were reduced by eating poisonous rhododendron honey? This fascinating book examines the cultural and natural history of 133 of the most beloved garden plants, revealing their survival strategies, growth habit and uses. It includes everything from the acer to the zinnia.

:: Vertical Gardens

By Leigh Clapp and Hattie Klotz (New Holland Publishers, £16.99): Gardening no longer needs to be confined to the ground. If you have limited space, this innovative guide offers quirky low-maintenance, space-saving, water-smart solutions, with ideas for vertical gardening on your balcony, your rooftop or courtyard. Learn how to turn bare garden spaces, such as a blank wall or fence, into living walls.



A brisk walk for every mince pie could become a new family tradition



An hour's fast swim will burn off that Christmas pudding with custard and brandy butter

Don't forget to factor in the festive workout

By Abi Jackson

WANT the Christmas treats but not the seasonal weight gain? Simple – just factor in some winter wonderland workouts.

Healthy eating has never been trendier – and that's fantastic. But, as those really in the know will tell you, it's all about the balance, and there are certain occasions when treats should well and truly be on the menu.

And the ultimate example of this? Christmas, obviously.

Feasting is part of the festive fun, and life is too short to never indulge. This is about far more than the joy of semi-permanently affixing a tub of Celebrations to the end of your arm for the Christmas weekend. For many, this is also part and parcel of having some quality time with family and friends, and clinking glasses and good grub can help bring the celebration to life.

There's always a flip-side, of course, and nobody's saying it's a good idea to gorge mindlessly – especially as it's estimated the average Brit consumes a whopping 7,000 kcals on Christmas Day alone, and will gain 6lbs between Christmas Eve and New Year's Day (eek!).

Thankfully, keeping active (is there anything lovelier than a walk on a crisp, peaceful winter's morning?) will help offset the calorific damage.

Here are five Christmas Calorie Kings – and what you'd need to do (bearing in mind that the exact amount of calories burned will depend on your weight, muscle mass and exercise intensity levels, of course) to burn them off...

One mince pie – approx 200 kcals

Burn it off – brisk one-hour walk

One of the great things about walking is that although it can feel like more of a pleasure than exercise, it still works wonders for health and fitness – and gets you out in the fresh air. A family walk would make a wonderful new tradition. It gets people out of the house and lets the kids run around a bit. Walking is also a fairly easy exercise that most of the family can do together. Another option would be bowling or ice-skating.

Glass of bucks fizz – approx 100 kcals

Burn it off – 10 minutes of rope skipping or a 'living room workout'

Can't afford or get to the gym? No fancy exercise equipment? No excuse! Get creative and do a quick workout at home. Skipping with a rope is a fantastic way to get your heart rate up – it gets you breathless in no time – or you could achieve similar results by doing a short session of burpees, star jumps and some body-weight exercises. You could also make these short bursts of exercise friendly competitions with family members – another new family tradition!

Six Quality Street chocolates – approx 260 kcals

Burn it off – Half an hour dancing

Go on; turn the TV off for half an hour and crank up the festive tunes. Whether you're by yourself, with the stuffy in-laws (oo-er) or have the whole clan round for the



Christmas dinner with all the trimmings? You'll need to do two hours of running to burn off the extra calories



Six Quality Street chocolates will give you around 260 calories

holidays, a bit of a living room boogie will work wonders for offsetting the seasonal stress and sluggishness. It might feel a bit daft at first if you're not used to letting your hair down, but what have you got to lose? (Well, those extra festive calories for a start...) And, do you know what? We bet you'll be laughing by the end.

Big Christmas dinner with all the trimmings – 1,500 kcals

Burn it off – Two-hours of running (or lots of regular exercise!)

It takes a fair bit of effort to burn off the average Christmas dinner, when portion

control goes out the window and many of us eat until we need to lie down and undo our waistbands. It is possible to burn 1,500 kcals in one workout, but attempting that isn't really a good idea unless you're already very active and used to that level of intensity. A better approach, for most, would be to aim to do regular, moderate-vigorous exercise such as an hour-long friendly football match in the park with mates, where you put effort into sprinting to the ball, an indoor cycling class, bootcamp class or a parkrun.

Another option to get heart rate up is



A glass of bucks fizz is around 10 minutes of skipping

manual labour – shovelling snow, gardening, clearing out the garage or vacuuming the house.

Christmas pudding with custard and/or brandy butter – approx 900 kcals

Burn it off – one-hour fast swim

Low-impact, and therefore gentle on joints, accessible and often suitable for those living with disabilities or chronic pain conditions too, swimming really is a fantastic form of exercise. If you can't manage a fast, one-hour swim, simply break it down to regular, manageable chunks.

fast the ticket

Evil delights

'Phil' plots a wicked End-er
See Page 23



**NATIVE
MONSTER**
Entertainment Unleashed



Sweet music

See Page 23

For full listings see **Express & Star** every Friday



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01902 319641

James Arthur



Wednesday, 7pm
02 Institute, Birmingham
Tickets sold out a while ago for the return of the 2012 X Factor champion who has won over new fans with his Back From The Edge album.
Visit academymusicgroup.com/o2institutebirmingham

Festive Favourites



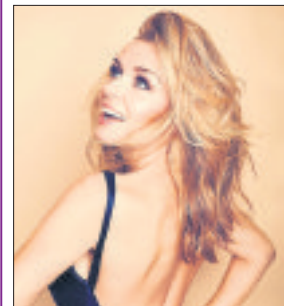
Friday and Monday, 7.30pm,
Sunday, 3.30pm, 7.30pm
Symphony Hall, Birmingham
Actress Jessica Hynes (pictured) presents a series of Christmas concerts featuring the CBSO's various choral groups, conducted by Simon Halsey.
Visit tshh.co.uk

Tinned Astronaut



Saturday, 7pm
Slade Rooms, Wolverhampton
Wolftown put on another showcase of the best new bands in the city, including Tinned Astronaut. Black and the Chilliholers, Second Hand Genes, HDS and Runaway Hounds.
Visit wolvescivic.co.uk

Katherine Jenkins



Thursday, 7.30pm
Symphony Hall, Birmingham
The celebrated Welsh soprano joins the London Concert Orchestra for a celebration with songs from her recent album celebrating the Queen's 90th birthday plus festive favourites.
Visit tshh.co.uk

CHRISTMAS

Kick up the 80's Christmas party night!
Tonight - tomorrow, £8
The River Rooms, Stourbridge, DY8 1JN.
Call 01384 397 177
Or 07986 577 661

Traditional Christmas Evenings
Tonight - Sun,
The Black Country Living Museum, Dudley, DY1 4SQ.
Call 01215 579643

Festive Favourites
Tonight, Sun - Mon, various
Birmingham Symphony Hall,
The International Convention Centre, Birmingham, B1 2EA.
Call 0121 780 3333

Roving Canal Traders Floating Christmas Market
Today - tomorrow,
Barclaycard Arena, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2AA.
Call 0121 780 4141

Christmas Charity Concert with Birmingham Festival Choral Society
Tomorrow,
Ladywood ARC, Birmingham, B16 8TF.
Call 0121 4540973

Christmas Crafts
Tomorrow,
Sandwell Valley Nature Reserve, West Bromwich, B43 5AG.
Call 0121 357 7395

Christmas storytelling in the house
Tomorrow,
Croome Court, High Green, Worcester, WR8 9DW.
Call 01905 371006

Christmas Ramble
Sun,
Weston Park, Weston-under-Lizard, Shifnal, TF11 8LE.
Call 01952 852100

Solihull Photographic Society - Christmas Knock Out
Tue,
Solihull Women's Institute, B91 3DQ.
Call 07815 165438

Carols and Sunday Lunch
Sun,
Weston Park, Weston-under-Lizard, Shifnal, TF11 8LE.
Call 01952 852100

Christmas Crafts
Sun,
Sandwell Valley Nature Reserve, West Bromwich, B43 5AG.
Call 0121 357 7395

Woodland Father Christmas
Sun,
Clent Hills, B62 0NL.
Call 01562 712 822

Ex Cathedra: Christmas Music by Candlelight
Mon - Wed,
St. Pauls Church, St. Pauls Square, Birmingham, B3 1QZ.
Call 0121 236 7858

Andy Williams Christmas Extravaganza 2016
starring The Osmonds
Thu,
Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB.
Call 01684 892277

Fred Zeppelin Xmas Bash
Thu, £10 - £12
The Robin 2, Bilston, WV14 7LJ.
Call 01902 401211

ROCK & METAL

Hells Bells - the UK's best AC/DC tribute
Tonight, £8 - £9
The RoadHouse Birmingham, Kings Norton, B30 3DZ.
Call 0121 246 2273

Bowie Experience
Tonight,
Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3AD.
Call 0844 871 7649

Status Quo: The Last Night of the Electrics
Tonight,
Barclaycard Arena, Birmingham, B1 2AA.
Call 0121 780 4141

Dark Side Of The Wall - a tribute to Pink Floyd
Tomorrow, £8 - £10
The RoadHouse Birmingham, Kings Norton, B30 3DZ.
Call 0121 246 2273

Madness
Tomorrow,
Barclaycard Arena, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2AA.
Call 0121 780 4141

Wolftown ft. Tinned Astronaut + others
Tomorrow,
The Slade Rooms, Wolverhampton, WV1 1HP.
Call 01902 552122

The Stones
Tonight,
Theatre on the Steps, Bridgnorth, WV16 4BD.
Call 01746 766477

Touchstone - Christmas Bash
Sun, £17.50 - £20
The Robin 2, Bilston, WV14 7LJ.
Call 01902 401211

The Sweet featuring Andy Scott
Mon, £20 - £22.50
The Robin 2, Bilston, WV14 7LJ.
Call 01902 401211

The Hair Rock Experience
Thu, £5
The RoadHouse Birmingham, Kings Norton, B30 3DZ.
Call 0121 246 2273

FOLK, COUNTRY & ACOUSTIC

Kit Hawes & Aaron Catlow
Tonight,
SpArC Theatre, Bishops Castle, SY9 5AY.
Call 01588 630321 or 01588 638038

Hollis & Hawkes Live Acoustic Set
Tonight,
Six Eight Cafe, Birmingham, B2 5HG.
Call 0121 448 8089

Traditional Music Session
Sun,
The Prince of Wales Moseley, Birmingham, B13 8EE.
Call 0121 4494198

JAZZ, SOUL, BLUES, MOTOWN & REGGAE

Red Lemon Electric Blues Band
Tonight,
Stourbridge Town Hall, DY8 1YE.
Call 01384 812960

Soul City
Sun, £18
The RoadHouse Birmingham, Kings Norton, B30 3DZ.
Call 0121 246 2273

Urban Intro
Mon - Wed, £5 - £10
The Jam House, Birmingham, B31QU.
Call 0121 200 3030

Jazz Tuesdays
Tue,
Spotted Dog, Digbeth, Birmingham, B12 0NH.
Call 0121 772 3822

Detroit Soul
Thu,
The Jam House, Birmingham, B31QU.
Call 0121 200 3030

POP

Spice Girls Tribute Night at Bel Air Nightclub
Tonight - Thu,
The Belfry Hotel & Resort, Wishaw, Sutton Coldfield, B76 9PR.
Call 0844 980 0600

Showaddywaddy
Tomorrow, £20 - £22
The Robin 2, Bilston, WV14 7LJ.
Call 01902 401211

Sunday Classics
Sun,
Spotted Dog, Digbeth, Birmingham, B12 0NH.
Call 0121 772 3822

James Arthur
Wed, 7pm
O2 Institute, Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 6DY.
Call 0121 437 4150

CLASSICAL

Stourport Choral Society
Wed,
Areley Kings Village Hall, Areley Common, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 0NB.
Call 07939 318973

Katherine Jenkins
Thu, 7pm
Birmingham Symphony Hall, The International Convention Centre, Birmingham, B1 2EA.
Call 0121 780 3333

COMEDY

Ken Dodd - Happiness Show
Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3AD.
Call 0844 871 7649

King Kong Comedy Club
Thu,
Gunmakers Arms, Birmingham, B4 6HG.
Call 0121 236 8486

THEATRE

Robin Hood: The Panto
Tonight - tomorrow,
Ludlow Assembly Rooms, SY8 1AZ.
Call 01584 878141

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland
Tonight, £8 - £16
Number 8 Community Arts Centre, Pershore WR10 1BG.
Call 01386 555028

Treasure Island
Tonight - Thu,
Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Library of Birmingham, B1 2EP.
Call 0121 236 4455

Chicago The Musical
Tonight - Thu,
New Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, B5 4DS.
Call 0844 871 3011

Faulty Towers The Dining Experience
Tonight - tomorrow, £50
Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Library of Birmingham, B1 2EP.
Call 0121 236 4455

A Christmas Carol
Tonight - tomorrow,
The Crescent Theatre, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B16 8AE.
Call 0121 643 5858

Aladdin
Tonight - tomorrow,
Hall Green Little Theatre, Birmingham, B27 7RY.
Call 0121 707 1874

Robin Rood: The Panto (relaxed performance)
Sun, £5 - £22
Ludlow Assembly Rooms, SY8 1AZ.
Call 01584 878141

The Muppet Christmas Carol (film screening)
Sun,
New Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, B5 4DS.
Call 0844 871 3011

Bolshoi: The Nutcracker
Sun, £11.20 - £13.44
Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB.
Call 01684 892277

A Christmas Wassail 2016
Sun - Tue,
The Crescent Theatre, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B16 8AE.
Call 0121 643 5858

Snow White - The World's Biggest Pantomime
Mon - Thu,
Barclaycard Arena, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2AA.
Call 0121 780 4141

Dick Whittington
Mon - Thu,
Birmingham Hippodrome, B5 4TB.
Call 0844 338 5000

Moscow State Circus
Tue - Thu,
Star City, Birmingham, B7 5SA.
Call 0121 270 4455

ARTS & CULTURE

Furs, Fire and Ice
Tonight,
Dewalls Court, Dewall, Hereford, HR2 8DA.
Call 01432 276 724

The Roaring 20s Party
Tonight - Sun, Thu,
The International Convention Centre, Birmingham, B1 2EA.
Call 0121 200 2000

Short Introductory Talk: Help & Healing on the Spiritual Path through the teaching of Bruno Groening
Tomorrow, Free
The Polish Millenium Centre, Birmingham, B5 5PH.
Call 0121 643 3577

Cellar Tour
Erasmus Darwin House, Lichfield, WS13 7AD.
Call 01543 306260

Whyley Dance
Tue,
Areley Kings Village Hall, Areley Common, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 0NB.
Call 07939 318973

Chance to Dance
Thu,
Areley Kings Village Hall, Areley Common, Stourport-on-Severn, DY13 0NB.
Call 07939 318973

Check out full listings in **the ticket** in Friday's Express & Star

EastEnders caught acting bug in Brum

STEVE 'Phil Mitchell' McFadden is a total rat. He's a dirty rat. He's King Rat.

From Monday to January 29 he'll be hamming it up with John Barrowman, comedy duo The Krankies, comedian Matt Slack, Over The Rainbow winner Danielle Hope and I'd Do Anything winner Jodie Prenger in Birmingham's biggest panto.

Audiences can expect plenty of laughs, outrageous costumes, wonderful sets and scenery, and some amazing special effects in Dick Whittington.

"It'll be good fun," he says. "I cut my teeth in panto working with Matt Slack. We're good mates. We hang out together and go for drinks. He's been on EastEnders as well."

Steve, Matt and co have spent several weeks getting the show in shape.

Steve's professional career has mostly centred in London. He hails from Maida Vale, learned how to act at Rada and played EastEnders hardman Phil Mitchell at the BBC's London studios. Birmingham, however, may well have put him on the road to his acting career.

Back in the 1970s he visited the Second City regularly to flog perfume and jewellery as he tried to earn a few bob as a Del Boy-style market trader.

"I used to work with my dad on the walkway to the Bull Ring," he says. "We used to park the old Austin Morris and have a bit of kit in the back. Then we'd do the walkway. I just remember this big wide concourse and we'd sell out every time."

"If it was raining in London we'd come up at the weekend and sell in



Steve 'Phil Mitchell' McFadden with Hippodrome panto co-star and pal Matt Slack

Birmingham instead. We'd smash it and we'd have a good laugh with the people."

The gear was straight up guv. Honest. And working as an out-of-the-suitcase trader helped turn Steve onto acting.

"We had a bit of a Del Boy thing

with my dad and his partner. We'd turn the milk crates upside down and sell off the top. I'd always have a laugh with the Brummies. In many ways, that was my first steps into acting, the first time I was dealing with the public face-to-face. I got confident doing that."

Sweet 70s memories

BLOCKBUSTER! Hellraiser. Teenage Rampage. Ballroom Blitz... solid gold glam rock 1970s hits that put The Sweet on Top Of The Pops and the cover of teenybopper mags more than 40 years ago.

Sweet are back on the road with original guitarist and co-singer Andy Scott (pictured left), including a gig at Bilston's Robin 2 venue on Monday. Original lead singer Brian Connolly died in 1997. Andy Scott's version of the band features lead vocals from bassist Pete Lincoln, who previously worked with Shakin' Stevens and Sir Cliff Richard. The band also features two former members of melodic hard rock outfit Praying Mantis, keyboards/guitarist Tony O'Hara and drummer Bruce Bisland.

Sweet are also special guests at the Bay City Rollers' Shang-a-Lang-a-Xmas Show at Wolverhampton Civic Hall tonight (Thursday), featuring original Rollers Les McKeown, Alan Longmuir and Stuart Wood.

The Sweet's 70s Black Country rivals Slade, featuring originals Dave Hill and Don Powell, have sold out their 'Ome Town gig at the Robin tomorrow (Friday).

Fans of rock 'n' roll can join 70s hitmakers, Showaddywaddy, at the Robin on Saturday. The retro outfit had ten top five hits - Hey Rock and Roll, Under the Moon of Love, When, You Got What It Takes, Three Steps to Heaven, Heartbeat, I Wonder Why, Dancin' Party, A Little Bit of Soap, and Pretty Little Angel Eyes. Ex-singer Dave Bartram has been the band's manager for 30 years and Andy Pelos took over as lead singer five years ago. The group features original members Romeo Challenger and Rod Deas.

Region's rockers in showcase gigs

CHECK out young bands tipped to break out of the West Midlands scene in 2017 at the showcase gig run by Baddies Boogie at the 02 Institute in Digbeth tomorrow night (Friday).

The five band line up in The Blue Room features Kung Fu Rin Tin Tin plus Brum outfit State, Wolverhampton four-piece Shush, Kidderminster's Plastic Scene and the Black Country's Rebellion.

It's the same night Wolverhampton powerhouse rock trio God Dam have a late finishing gig at the Hare and Hounds pub in Kings Heath. Also on that bill are Johnny Foreigner, Youth Man, False Grails and Matters.

Red hot and blue with the Lemons

RED Lemons Electric Blues Band, one of the top live bands in the Black Country and Brum back in the '80s, have got the band back together for another reunion concert.

Following the success of last year's 30 year reunion shows, the Red Lemons are going to bring their good time R&B and soul back to Stourbridge Town Hall tomorrow night (Friday).

The band fronted by Big Jim Merris has celebrity fans including brief former member Adrian Chiles and Suzi Perry. The gig is on its way to being a sell-out. Tickets cost £22, on 0870 320 7000, or see www.dudley.gov.uk/entertainment website.

Jungle Joel jokes at Slade Rooms

COMEDIAN and actor Joel Dommett will bring his new show to Wolverhampton next year. The runner-up in this year's I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here, will perform at the Slade Rooms on March 2.

Starting out on the comedy scene in 2007, the 30-year-old has gone onto receive critical acclaim for his Edinburgh Fringe shows and in numerous television shows.

Meanwhile, satirical comedian Andy Zaltman brings his Plan Z to the same Broad Street venue on February 24.

For tickets call 0870 320 7000, or email boxoffice@wolvescivic.co.uk.



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CHOICE



Darcey Bussell

Strictly Come Dancing (BBC1, 6.40pm)
Over the past 13 weeks, we've experienced highs, lows and Ed Balls performing a salsa to Gangnam Style, but hopefully Strictly has still got some surprises in store as the remaining celebrity finalists face one last ballroom battle to see who will be lifting the famous trophy. Some viewers pegged Danny Mac as the winner following his impressive week one cha cha cha, but we could be in for an upset as the stars perform three routines—their favourite number from the series, the judges' choice (which in previous years has usually been one the celebrity didn't quite nail to see if they can improve) and the no-holds-barred showdance. There'll also be group number, a performance by Emeli Sande.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** James Martin – Home Comforts at Christmas. (R) **12.00** Football Focus. **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Sports Personality 2016: The Contenders. (R) **2.15** Bargain Hunt. **3.15** Escape to the Country. (R) **4.00** Final Score. **5.30** BBC News. **5.40** Regional Programme. **5.50** Pointless Celebrities.
6.40 **Strictly Come Dancing.** Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman host the live grand final, which sees the remaining three celebrities and their partners performing three routines each – a spectacular showdance, a routine from the series chosen by the judges and the one routine they hope will help them lift the glitterball trophy. Len Goodman, Bruno Tonioli, Craig Revel Horwood and Darcey Bussell give their comments and score the performances, but they are for guidance only – the decision as to who waltzes off with this year's title is strictly down to the viewers' vote. Last in the series.
8.55 **Michael McIntyre's Big Show.** Jack Whitehall joins Michael on stage at London's Theatre Royal on Drury Lane, along with Sting, who performs some of his classic hits, and music from his new album 57th & 9th. Plus, Ricky Gervais's insufferable middle-manager-turned-musician David Brent makes a special appearance. Celebrity chef Jamie Oliver risks the ire of his friends and family as Michael seizes his phone in Send To All, and two people from the same family receive the surprise of their lives in Unexpected Star.
9.55 **BBC News;** Weather.
10.15 **The National Lottery Live.** The all-important winning numbers are revealed.
10.25 **Match of the Day.** Gary Lineker presents highlights of the latest Premier League matches, including Crystal Palace v Chelsea and West Bromwich Albion v Manchester United; National Lottery Update.
11.45 **The NFL Show.** Mark Chapman looks at the major stories shaping the NFL world, joined by former Super Bowl winners Osi Umenyiora and Jason Bell.
12.15 **Film:** Old School. (2003) **1.45** Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.50** BBC News.

BBC2

6.50 **Film:** Holiday Affair. (1949) **8.15** **Film:** The Bishop's Wife. (1947) **10.00** This Farming Life. (R) **11.00** This Farming Life. (R) **12.00** Wild Japan. (R) **1.00** Wild Japan. (R) **2.00** Wild Japan. (R) **3.00** **Film:** The Odd Life of Timothy Green. (2012) Fantasy, starring Jennifer Garner. **4.35** **Film:** Nativity 2: Danger in the Manger! (2012) Comedy sequel, starring David Tennant.
6.25 **Dad's Army.** First-ever episode of the classic comedy, in which bank manager George Mainwaring assembles a motley crew of volunteers to protect Britain from Nazi invasion. Arthur Lowe stars.
6.55 **Operation Snow Tiger.** Part two of two. Cameraman Max Hux Williams follows a tiger to see if she has new cubs, while Liz Bonnin searches for another female that has gone missing. (R) **4.00** **Film:** Walt Disney – Part Two. Documentary exploring the life, career and legacy of Walt Disney, presenting a portrait of the animator as an ambitious entrepreneur whose masterpieces defined an industry.
8.55 **Film:** A Christmas Carol. (2009) A foul-tempered Victorian miser who hates the festive season is visited on Christmas Eve by a series of ghosts. The spirits intend to make him mend his wicked ways by showing him visions of the past, the present and what the future will hold for him if he does not change for the better. Animated fantasy based on Charles Dickens' novel, featuring motion-captured performances by Jim Carrey and Gary Oldman.
10.25 **Oil XL.** Sandi Toksvig quizzes guests Miles Jupp, Deirdre O'Kane and Phill Jupitus and regular panelist Alan Davies on a series of subjects involving non sequiturs in this extended episode.
11.10 **Porridge.** Fletch discovers fellow inmates at Slade Prison are planning an escape over Christmas. Festive edition from 1975, with Ronnie Barker. (R)
11.50 **The Making of Young Men.** Documentary going behind the scenes of BalletBoyz' first feature film, a re-working of the company's hugely successful stage production of the same name that premiered in 2015.
12.20 BalletBoyz – Young Men. (R) **1.20** **Film:** Chances Are. (1989) **3.05** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. (R) **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **6.40** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **7.00** Super 4. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.20** Oddbods. (R) **7.25** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.30** Scrambled!: Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Horrid Henry. (R) **8.10** Scrambled!: The Peverlist Girls. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Be Cool, Scooby-Do! **9.05** Scrambled!: Adventure Time. (R) **9.25** **Film:** Carry On Follow That Camel. (1967) Comedy, with Jim Dale. **11.20** Judge Rinder. (R) **12.25** **Film:** Weather. **12.35** This Time Next Year. (R) **1.35** **Film:** Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium. (2007) Fantasy comedy, starring Dustin Hoffman and Natalie Portman. **3.20** Thunderbirds Are Go. **3.45** Regional Programme. Weather. **4.00** **Film:** The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring. (2001) Fantasy adventure, starring Elijah Wood.
7.30 **Film:** The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey. (2012) Unassuming hobbit Bilbo Baggins is pulled out of his comfortable life when Gandalf the wizard volunteers him for a dangerous quest. He joins a party of dwarves who are on a mission to reclaim their lost homeland, which has been taken over by a dragon. When the group journeys into the Misty Mountains, Bilbo becomes separated from the dwarves and falls into a cave, where he finds himself confronted by Gollum and forced to play a riddle game. It is set in Middle-earth 60 years before the events of The Lord of the Rings and is the first part of Peter Jackson's fantasy adventure trilogy based on J.R.R. Tolkien's novel, starring Richard Freeman, Ian McKellen, Martin Armitage, James Nesbitt, Ken Stott, Cate Blanchett, Ian Holm and Christopher Lee.
10.40 **Film:** Weather.
10.55 **Film:** Private Benjamin. (1980) A society widow enlists in the army in the hope of finding a new direction, but comes into conflict with her tough commanding officer. Comedy, with Goldie Hawn and Armand Assante.
12.55 Jackpot247. Viewers get the chance to participate in live interactive gaming from the comfort of their sofas, with a mix of roulette-wheel spins and lively chat from the presenting team.
3.00 **Film:** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.10 Three Peaks Yacht Race. **7.05** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.30** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.00** Frasier. (R) **8.30** Frasier. (R) **9.00** The Morning Line. **10.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.25** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.50** The Simpsons. (R) **11.15** The Simpsons. (R) **11.45** **Film:** The Dog Who Saved the Holidays. (2012) Premiere. Comedy sequel, starring Shelley Long. **1.30** Channel 4 Racing. Live coverage from Ascot and Haydock Park. **4.05** The Simpsons. (R) **4.35** The Simpsons. (R) **5.05** Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas. (R) **5.40** **Film:** Arthur Christmas. (2011) Animated comedy, with the voice of James McAvoy.
7.30 **Channel 4 News.**
8.00 **Tree of the Year with Ardal O'Hanlon.** The comedian and former Father Ted actor visits some of the UK's most remarkable trees, before revealing the winners of the Woodland Trust's prestigious Tree of the Year awards from a 28-strong shortlist. Each winning specimen from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is then put to a panel of experts, who select just one of the four to take the overall title of UK Tree of the Year.
9.00 **It Was Airright in the 1970s.** Matt Lucas narrates this look at the programmes that flirted with danger during the decade, including Blue Peter, which carried on filming as a fire broke out live on air, while The Fun of the Fair showcased teenage girls riding motorcycles through burning hoops. At the same time government-produced public information films petrified viewers with scary scenarios of possible accidents in the home. Contributors include Robin Askwith, Liza Goddard, Oona King, Olive Anderson, Philippa Perry, Samira Ahmed, Ellie Taylor and Angela Barnes.
10.00 **Film:** Escape Plan. (2013) A security expert is incarcerated after being duped and tries to break out with the help of a fellow convict. Thriller, with Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger.
12.15 **Film:** The Guest. (2014) **2.00** Bear's Wild Weekend with Jonathan Ross. (R) **2.50** The Last Leg. (R) **3.45** Hollyoaks. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **10.15** The Gadget Show. (R) **11.15** **Film:** A Cinderella Christmas. (2016) **1.05** **Film:** Christmas Cookies. (2016) Premiere. Romantic drama, starring Jill Wagner and Wes Brown. **2.50** **Film:** Love Always, Santa. (2016) Premiere. Festive romance, starring Marguerite Moreau. **4.35** **Film:** Christmas Under Wraps. (2014) Premiere. Drama, starring Candace Cameron Bure.
6.25 **Film:** Space Cowboys. (2000) A former Air Force test pilot, who was sidelined from space exploration because of his difficult character, is recruited 40 years later to help America's post-Cold War Russian allies. Teaming up with three fellow veteran airmen, he uses his expertise in navigation to stop a malfunctioning Soviet satellite from crashing to Earth. Adventure, directed by and starring Clint Eastwood. With Tommy Lee Jones, James Garner, Donald Sutherland and James Cromwell. Includes 5 News at 7.25pm. Edited for language.
9.00 **Football on 5: The Championship.** George Riley and Lynsey Hipgrave introduce highlights from the weekend's games in the Championship, including Burton Albion v Newcastle United at the Pirelli Stadium, Birmingham City v Brighton & Hove Albion at the AMEX Stadium and Blackburn Rovers v Reading at Ewood Park.
10.00 **Film:** On 5: Goal Rush. George Riley and Lynsey Hipgrave introduce all the goals from the weekend's games in the Leagues One and Two, including Scunthorpe United v Millwall.
10.30 **The Funny Thing About Christmas.** A selection of comedians and celebrities, including Anthea Turner, Vanessa Feltz, Carl Fogarty and Kerry Godliman, discuss everything they love and loathe about the festive season.
11.30 **Greatest Ever Christmas Songs.** A celebratory compilation of some of the biggest festive songs over the last 50 years, featuring a wide variety of artists including the Poggies, Johnny Mathis and the Darkness.
1.25 SuperCasino. **3.10** All New Traffic Cops. (R) **4.00** The Secret Life of Puppies: Terrible Twos. (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.40** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 Queen Elizabeth I: A Timewatch Guide **8.00** Last Journey of the Magna Carta King **9.00** Modus **10.30** Top of the Pops: 1982 **11.00** Ultimate Number 1s at the BBC **12.00** Agnetha: Abba and After **1.00** Kings of 70s Romance **2.00** Burt Bacharach: A Life in Song **3.30** Close **ITV2**
11.35 Catchphrase Celebrity Special **12.35** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **1.35** Elf: Buddy's Magical Christmas **2.35** **Film:** Peter Pan (2003) **3.35** FYI Daily **3.40** **Film:** Peter Pan (2003) **4.45** **Film:** Snow Dogs (2002) **7.00** You've Been Framed! at Christmas **8.00** Scorpion **9.00** **Film:** A Very Harold & Kumar Christmas (2011) **10.50** Family Guy **12.15** Mom 12.00 American Dad! **1.10** **Film:** Bring It On (2000) **3.00** Teleshopping **ITV3**
1.50 Foyle's War **3.50** Midsummer Murders **5.55** Midsummer Murders: Ghosts of Christmas Past **8.00** Doc Martin **9.00** The Booze Cruise III **11.00** Inspector Morse **1.15** Wycliffe **2.10** **Film:** Nightscreen **2.30** Teleshopping **ITV4**
12.40 **Film:** The Great Outdoors (1988) **1.45** FYI Daily **1.50** **Film:** The Great Outdoors (1988) **2.30** **Film:** Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989) **3.30** FYI Daily **3.35** **Film:** Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989) **4.15** **Film:** Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey (1989) **5.15** FYI Daily **5.20** **Film:** Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey (1989) **6.10** **Film:** On Her Majesty's Secret Service (1969) **7.15** FYI Daily **7.20** **Film:** On Her Majesty's Secret Service (1969) **9.00** **Film:** The Specialist (1994) **10.05** FYI Daily **10.10** **Film:** The Specialist (1994) **11.10** **Film:** Inside Man (2006) **12.15** FYI Daily **12.20** **Film:** Inside Man (2006) **1.50** Hell on Wheels **2.45** Movies Now **2.50** **Film:** IV Nightscreen **3.00** Teleshopping **E4**
11.05 Melissa & Joey **1.00** Black-ish **2.00** **Film:** Diary of a Wimpy Kid (2010) **4.00** The Goldbergs **5.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** **Film:** The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1 (2011) **11.20** Gogglebox **1.25** Rude Tube **2.30** The Inbetweeners **3.25** New Girl **5.00** Revenge **Film4**
11.00 Black Nativity (2013) **1.00** Step Up (2006) **3.05** Carry On Regardless (1961) **4.55** Chalet Girl (2011) **6.50** Men in Black 3 (2012) **9.00** Bridesmaids (2011) **11.25** Devil's Due (2014) **1.10** Terminator Salvation (2009) **3.30** Close

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CHOICE



Sports Personality of the Year 2016 (BBC1, 6.40pm)
Gary Lineker, Clare Balding and Gabby Logan present this year's ceremony live from the Genting Arena in Birmingham. Tennis star Andy Murray was presented the prestigious main award in 2015 and is in contention once again after a stellar year that saw him win Wimbledon, claim his second Olympic gold medal and remarkably overhaul Novak Djokovic to end 2016 as world number one. However, he is likely to face stiff competition from other Rio medalists, such as Mo Farah, Laura Kenny and Alistair Brownlee. The Team of the Year, Lifetime Achievement, Young Sports Personality of the Year and Unsung Hero awards will also be handed out.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **7.40** Match of the Day. (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** Fern Britton Meets Rebecca Ferguson. **11.00** Regional Programme. **12.15** Bargain Hunt. (R) **1.00** BBC News. Weather. **1.15** Ploig II (R) **2.10** Elizabeth at 90 – A Family Tribute. (R) **3.40** Planet Earth II. (R) **4.40** Songs of Praise. **5.15** BBC News. **5.30** Regional Programme. **5.40** Countryfile. **6.40** **Sports Personality of the Year 2016.** Gary Lineker, Clare Balding and Gabby Logan present this year's ceremony live from the Genting Arena in Birmingham. Tennis star Andy Murray was presented the prestigious main award in 2015 and is in contention once again after a stellar year that saw him win Wimbledon, claim his second Olympic gold medal and remarkably overhaul Novak Djokovic to end 2016 as world number one. **9.00** **The Apprentice.** In 11 weeks of challenges that have seen the teams selling sweets, crowdfunding and becoming personal shoppers in a leading department store, the final two battle it out to go into partnership with Alan Sugar. Their final task is to launch their businesses and present their ideas to an audience of industry experts at City Hall, London. But they need assistance, so former contenders return to help each finalist as they come up with brands, devise campaigns and make TV adverts. Will the industry bigwigs like their ideas? And who will have done enough to convince Lord Sugar to pick them as his partner? Last in the series. **10.00** **The Apprentice: You're Hired.** Rhod Gilbert is joined by the winner, the runner-up and Lord Sugar himself, as the business tycoon reveals the reasons behind his final decision. Last in the series. **11.00** BBC News. **11.20** Regional Programme. **11.30** **Walliams & Friend.** Meera Syal becomes David Walliams' latest "friend", joining forces with him in a variety of sketches. A number of celebrities also make fleeting appearances. (R) **12.00** Have I Got a Bit More News for You. Gary Lineker hosts an extended edition of the satirical quiz. **12.45** Weather for the Week Ahead. **12.50** BBC News.

BBC2

6.20 A to Z of TV Gardening. (R) **7.05** Big Dreams Small Spaces. (R) **8.05** Countryfile. (R) **9.00** Super Powered Owls: Natural World. (R) **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.30** A to Z of Christmas Cooking. (R) **12.15** MOTD2 Extra. **1.00** Tom Ridge Cooks Christmas. (R) **1.30** Equestrian: Olympia 2016. **4.35** Full Steam Ahead. (R) **5.35** Film: The Terminal. (2004) An Eastern European en route to America is stranded after a coup in his homeland. Comedy, starring Tom Hanks and Catherine Zeta-Jones. **7.40** **Victoria Wood as Seen on TV Special.** Comedy sketches written by and starring Victoria Wood, with Julie Walters, Celia Imrie, Duncan Preston and Susie Blake. (R) **8.20** **Best of British: Victoria Wood.** The comedian and writer looks back on her career in a programme originally broadcast in 1998. She reflects on her childhood in 1960s Lancashire and her long and successful career as a performer. Featuring contributions from regular collaborators Julie Walters and Celia Imrie, and famous fans including Cilla James, Thora Hird and Caroline Aherne. (R) **9.00** **Victoria Wood's Midlife Christmas.** A festive special from 2009 that attempts to cram an entire night's Christmas viewing into 60 minutes. Highlights include the Midlife Olympics 2009, popular costume drama Lark Pies to Cranchesterford and the adventures of soap star Bo Beaumont, played by Victoria's long-time collaborator Julie Walters. Others joining in the fun are Della Smith, Jayne Torvill, Christopher Dean, Reece Shearsmith and Anton Du Beke. (R) **10.00** **Victoria Wood: At it Again.** A filmed performance at the Royal Albert Hall, taken from the comedian's 2001 UK tour. **11.30** **Film: Last Chance Harvey.** (2008) A miserable New Yorker falls for an equally unfulfilled woman he meets while in London to attend his daughter's wedding. Romantic drama, starring Dustin Hoffman and Emma Thompson. **12.55** Sign Zone. Countryfile. (R) **1.50** Holby City. Essie's feelings towards Parker lead her to make a questionable decision. (R) **2.50** This Is BBC Two. Preview of upcoming programmes.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. (R) **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Sooty. (R) **6.55** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **7.00** Super 4. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.20** Oddbods. (R) **7.25** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.30** Scrambled!: Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Horrid Henry. (R) **8.10** Scrambled!: The Powerpuff Girls. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.05** Scrambled!: Adventure Time. (R) **9.25** Film: All Stars. (2013) **11.20** Let's Do Christmas with Gino & Mel. (R) **12.15** ITV News. Weather. **12.20** Off Their Rockers. (R) **12.50** Film: The Incredible Hulk. (2008) Comic-book adventure, starring Edward Norton. **2.55** Film: National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation. (1989) Comedy, starring Chevy Chase. **4.45** Film: Santa Claus: The Movie. (1985) Family fantasy adventure, starring Dudley Moore. **6.40** **Regional Programme.** Weather. **6.50** **ITV News.** Weather. **7.00** **All Star Mr & Mrs Christmas Special.** Phill Schofield hosts a special festive edition of the game show, in which celebrity guest couples reveal how much they know about each other – or not, as the case may be. The contestants are Dominic Brunt (Emmerdale's Paddy Kirk) and his wife Jo, boxer Lennox Lewis and his wife violet and T'Pau singer Carol Decker and her husband Richard. **8.00** **Midsomer Murders.** Christmas special of the detective drama. The village of Little Auburn has stood abandoned since the Second World War, but now plans are afoot to restore it to its former glory. However, the grand reopening takes a grisly turn when a man is murdered. DCI Barnaby and his new partner DS Jamie Winter are soon on the case, and must unravel a web of lies connecting past and present to bring the killer to justice. Neil Dudgeon stars, with Nick Hendrix making his debut as Barnaby's latest assistant. Guest starring Hugh Dennis and Sally Phillips. **10.00** **ITV News.** Weather. **10.20** **Film: Hot Fuzz.** (2007) A zealous policeman is relocated to a sleepy country village. Action comedy, starring Simon Pegg. **12.35** Jackpot247. **3.00** Motorsport UK. **3.50** ITV Nightscreen. **5.05** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R)

CHANNEL 4

6.20 Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **6.45** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.10** Frasier. (R) **7.40** Frasier. (R) **8.05** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **8.35** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **9.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.30** Lewis vs Nice: F1 2016. **2.05** Film: Inkheart. (2008) Fantasy adventure, starring Brendan Fraser. **4.10** The Snowman. (R) **4.45** Channel 4 News. **5.10** Film: Cars. (2006) Pixar animated adventure, with the voices of Owen Wilson and Paul Newman. **7.30** **Britain's Wildest Weather.** Footage of unusual weather conditions recorded in Britain during 2016, and exploring the factors that led to these incidents. The programme features footage recorded by people caught in the middle of floods, super-storms, tornadoes and lightning strikes, as well as a look at how a record level El Niño effect altered Britain's weather. **9.00** **Humans.** In the aftermath of the silo tragedy, Hester seeks revenge on Leo, while Karen decides she and Sam, have no future, and decides to take matters into her own hands. Niska plans to return to Berlin with Astrid, but struggles with the idea of abandoning her family, and Joe makes a shocking confession to Laura. Last in the series. **10.00** **Gogglebox.** Capturing the households' instant reactions to what they are watching on TV from the comfort of their own sofas. (R) **11.05** **Film: About a Boy.** (2002) A womaniser who poses as a father to meet single women changes his ways after befriending a lonely youngster. Romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Toni Collette and Nicholas Hoult. **12.55** **Film: Before I Go to Sleep.** (2014) A woman who cannot retain her memories tries to piece together her past, and fears her husband is hiding something from her. Thriller, starring Nicole Kidman and Colin Firth. **2.25** 60 Days in Jail. Jeff pursues a friendship with a duplicitous inmate and ends up in a dangerous situation. Zed receives a visit from his wife and Tami's feud with Barbara continues. (R) **3.20** Kirstie and Phil's Love It or List It. (R) **4.15** Location, Location, Location. Kirstie Allcott and (R) **5.10** Supershoppers. Claims of huge reductions by high-street discount stores. (R) **5.40** The Day of Queens. Doug plans a Valentine's Day meal. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Monkey. **6.05** Pop Box. (R) **6.10** Peppa Pig. (R) **6.15** Angelina Ballerina. (R) **6.25** Bob the Builder. (R) **6.40** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **6.50** Zack and Quack. (R) **7.00** Seaside Antics. (R) **7.05** Fireman Sam. (R) **7.15** Pip Ahoy! (R) **7.30** Little Princess. (R) **7.40** Paw Patrol. (R) **8.00** Blaze and the Monster Machines. (R) **8.25** Noddy in Toyland. (R) **8.40** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **9.00** Shimmer and Shine. (R) **9.25** Peppa Pig. (R) **9.35** Peppa Pig. (R) **9.45** Jelly Jamm. (R) **10.00** Football on 5: The Championship. (R) **11.00** Football on 5: Goal Rush. (R) **11.30** The Gadget Show. (R) **12.30** Film: A Perfect Christmas List. (2014) Drama, starring Ellen Hollman. **2.15** Film: Lost Letter Mysteries for Christmas. (2014) Festive comedy, starring Eric Mabius. **4.00** Film: The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey. (2007) Family drama, starring Tom Berenger. **5.45** Film: Scrooge. (1970) Musical fantasy, starring Albert Finney. **8.00** **Michael Buble at Christmas.** The Canadian crooner's fifth festive special sees him take to the stage of the Orpheus Theatre in Los Angeles, with guest appearances by Celine Dion, Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings, and Toni Kelly. The music features classics such as White Christmas, Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas, Jingle Bells, This Christmas and Here Comes Santa Claus. Michael also performs the premiere of his new Christmas song, The More You Give (The More You'll Have). (R) **8.55** **5 News Weekend.** **9.00** **Film: Hercules.** (2014) Premiere. The ancient Greek warrior becomes famous as highly exaggerated tales of his exploits spread throughout the land. He is forced to live up to his mythological status when he joins forces with a group of mercenaries to restore a deposed king to his rightful throne. Action adventure, starring Dwayne Johnson, Ian McShane and John Hurt. Includes 5 News at 10pm. **10.55** **Film: Snitch.** (2013) A man volunteers to become an undercover informant in a drug trafficking operation to save his son from prison. Crime thriller, starring Dwayne Johnson. **1.00** SuperCasino. **3.10** The Yorkshire Vet: Winter on the Moors. (R) **4.00** Now That's Funny! (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R) **5.40** Angels of Jarm. (R) **5.50** Roary the Racing Car. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 Danielle de Niese: The Birth of an Opera **8.00** The Barber of Seville from Glyndebourne **10.45** Lucy Worsley: Mozart's London Odyssey **11.45** Horizon: Solar Storms – The Threat to Planet Earth **12.45** How to Build a Jumbo Jet Engine **1.45** Inside Porton Down: Britain's Secret Weapons Research Facility **2.45** How to Build Britain's Secret Engineers **3.45** Close **ITV2**
12.20 You've Been Framed at Christmas! **1.20** The Smurfs: A Christmas Carol **1.45** Film: Santa Paws 2: The Santa Pups (2012) **3.40** Film: Mickey's Twice Upon a Christmas (2004) **5.05** Catchphrase Christmas Special **6.05** The X Factor Winner's Story **7.10** Film: The Amazing Spider-Man (2012) **10.00** Family Guy **11.55** American Dad! **12.55** The Cleveland Show **1.55** Bordertown **2.20** Teleshopping **5.50** ITV2 Nightscreen **ITV4**
1.25 Film: Rio Bravo (1959) **4.15** Film: The Horse Soldiers (1959) **6.40** Film: Diamonds Are Forever (1971) **9.00** Film: The Deer Hunter (1978) **10.05** FYI Daily **10.10** Film: The Deer Hunter (1978) **12.45** Hell on Wheels **1.40** Quincy ME **2.45** Ironside **3.40** Tommy Cooper **4.10** The Wine Show **E4**
12.00 Film: Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Rodrick Rules (2011) **2.00** Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas **2.25** The Goldbergs **5.05** The Big Bang Theory **9.00** Film: The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2 (2012) **11.20** Tattoo Fixers **12.25** Gogglebox **1.30** The Inbetweeners **2.35** New Girl **3.45** Hollyoaks **Film4**
11.00 Mr Popper's Penguins (2011) **1.00** The Tale of the Princess Kaguya (2013) **3.50** Miracle on 34th Street (1994) **6.05** The Karate Kid (2010) **9.00** Knight and Day (2010) **11.10** August: Osage County (2013) **1.30** Before the Devil Knows You're Dead (2007) **3.50** Close

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FILM CHOICES

MONDAY

A Christmas Reunion, Channel 5, 5.15pm

High-flying executive Amy inherits half of her aunt's bakery, but the catch is the remaining share has been left to her former high-school sweetheart. The pair are reunited in their home town just in time to organise the annual Christmas cookie contest. Romantic drama, starring Denise Richards and Jake Busey. (2015)

TUESDAY

Forgetting Sarah Marshall, ITV, 10.40pm

A musician is devastated when his actress girlfriend leaves him, and he tries to cure his broken heart with a holiday in Hawaii. Unfortunately, his efforts to forget the past are scuppered when his ex turns out to be staying at the same resort with her new boyfriend – a successful rock star – in tow. Romantic comedy, starring Jason Segel and Kristen Bell. (2008)



Saving Mr Banks, Friday, BBC2, 8.30pm

WEDNESDAY

Wanted, ITV, 10.40pm

A disillusioned man learns his father was a member of a secret society of superpowered assassins dedicated to eliminating people who are destined to commit acts of evil in the future. Having inherited his father's special abilities, he is recruited into the organisation and must take on a former member who has betrayed it. Action adventure, starring James McAvoy, Angelina Jolie and Morgan Freeman. (2008)

THURSDAY

Alan Partridge: Alpha Papa, BBC2, 11.05pm

The hapless local radio DJ ends up in the centre of a crisis when a colleague gets fired by the station's new owners, only to respond by returning to the studio with a shotgun and taking hostages. The police enlist Alan's aid as a negotiator, giving him the chance to revive his own flagging public profile. Comedy, starring Steve Coogan and Sean Pertwee. (2013)

FRIDAY

Saving Mr Banks, BBC2, 8.30pm

Premiere. Walt Disney tries to persuade the creator of Mary Poppins to part with the movie rights to her beloved creation. Fact-based drama, with Emma Thompson, Tom Hanks, Paul Giamatti and Colin Farrell. (2013)

Series proves it is far from an amateur affair

They say that roles for people of a certain age are rare, and that if you're an actress over the age of 40, you may as well forget it.

Well, try telling that to Sally Wainwright, the woman behind two of the BBC's biggest drama hits of the last five years – Happy Valley and Last Tango in Halifax.

The former won't be back on our screens for a couple of years, apparently, because Wainwright is so busy working on other projects, but it's provided Sarah Lancashire, who is 52, with arguably the best role of her career, that of gritty policewoman Catherine Cawood.

She also appears in Last Tango and has been Bafta-nominated for both parts (winning for Happy Valley in 2014).

"When you read Sally's scripts, they're not like scripts, they're like transcripts of people's lives and they breathe immediately," says Lancashire of Wainwright's work. "Her words do it for you, you don't have to think about it too much; in

fact it's often best to let her writing do it for you. She's just top of her game really."

But Lancashire isn't the only actor to benefit from Wainwright's Last Tango – its leads are portrayed by Anne Reid (81) and Derek Jacobi (78), while Nicola Walker (46) also appears.

If you haven't caught the series by now, what have you been doing? You've certainly been missing a treat – the tale of seventysomething former teenage sweethearts Alan and Celia finding love again after 60 years apart is touching, moving and, at times, hilarious. It's also inspired by Wainwright's own mother who reconnected with an old flame she hadn't seen since she was 15.

It's almost two years since we last caught up with them, and this new, two-part episode picks up where the previous series left off, with Celia's daughter Caroline (Lancashire) still coming to terms with the death of her wife Kate.

Perhaps it's her struggle to cope that inspires Caroline to consider a

fresh start away from the Harrogate home she shares with Alan and Celia. Regular viewers will be aware that Caroline bought her ex-husband out of the property with financial help from her mother and stepfather – so where will her decision to move on leave them?

For now, that remains a mystery, and the couple don't seem unduly concerned about their fate either – perhaps because they are too wrapped up in the local amateur dramatics group to notice; Celia's debut in a leading role in Noel Coward's Blithe Spirit seems to be taking all their time, attention and energy.

Meanwhile, somebody should keep an eye on Alan's daughter Gillian. She's a bit of a loose cannon at the best of times, but she seems to be sailing close to the edge as mysterious goings-on in her farm's barn lead her to believe that the past is coming back to haunt her.

The concluding part airs on Tuesday, but there is some good news – a fourth is on its way.



Derek Jacobi stars in Last Tango in Halifax, Monday, BBC1, 9pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY

Sir Lenny Henry – A Life on Screen BBC2, 9pm

When Lenny Henry won the New Faces talent show in 1975, those watching probably never expected him to go on to be an acclaimed Shakespearean actor and knight of the realm. In fact, we boldly suggest that Henry himself probably thought that such a twist in his life and career seemed highly unlikely. But during his 41 years in the public eye, Sir Lenworth George Henry, to give him his full name, has used his talents in a wide variety of genres, from comedy to drama, to writing and stand-up, not to mention TV presenting, music and, of course, Shakespeare. As a result, Henry fully deserves this tribute to his career, which features clips from various projects, as well as interviews with friends and colleagues, and with the man himself.

TUESDAY

Hilda Ogden's Last Ta-ra – A Tribute to Jean Alexander ITV, 8pm

They may have moved out of Coronation Street in 1987 after a 23-year stint, but Hilda Ogden remains one of British soap's most iconic characters. So it's only fitting that ITV is paying tribute to the actress who played her, Jean Alexander, who died in

October. The documentary features contributions from former colleagues William Roache, Michael Le Vell and Sally Dynevor, who also enjoy watching classic moments in a special recreation of Stan and Hilda Ogden's famous living room. Younger members of the Corrie cast also celebrate Hilda's legacy and famous fans, including Paul O'Grady, provide their own memories.

WEDNESDAY This Time Next Year ITV, 8pm

Davina McCall meets Rebecca and Richard Francis from Camarthen in Wales who are hoping to finally be able to extend their family and have a child. After suffering a number of miscarriages and unsure if this is linked to Rebecca's diabetes, the couple are hoping a new treatment method will allow them to finally have the baby they long for. The presenter also meets Luke Reeson who was hoping to make the GB Paralympic swim team and head to Rio. The 27-year-old from Cumbria took up swimming after suffering a gunshot wound to his leg and groin whilst serving in Afghanistan and found a new

career path. Will Luke be able to achieve his dream and earn a place on Team GB?

THURSDAY Who Do You Think You Are? BBC1, 8pm

The Royle Family star Ricky Tomlinson sets out to trace his family tree. The actor is well known for playing the archetypal scouser – and it turns out his Liverpool roots run deep. Ricky discovers that he comes from generations of carters, who transported goods on Liverpool's docks when the city was the British Empire's busiest port. Ricky's rage and sorrow grow as he discovers how dangerous conditions were for his ancestors, eerily echoing his own fight for workers' rights as a trade unionist in the 1970s.



Hilda Ogden's Last Ta-ra – A Tribute to Jean Alexander, Tuesday, ITV, 8pm

FRIDAY

Strictly Len Goodman BBC1, 7pm

It's the end of a Strictly era – head judge Len Goodman is hanging up his 'seven' paddle and stepping down from the panel. We'll still get to see him offer his opinions on the Christmas special, but this programme serves as his goodbye as he looks back over his time on Strictly – and seeing as he's been there since the first episode, it also functions as a history of one of Britain's most popular shows. Few people could have guessed when the pro-celebrity ballroom challenge began in 2004 as part of Sport Relief that it would become such a ratings juggernaut, turning the judges and many of the professional dancers into celebrities in their own right. Here, some of the cast members past and present share their memories of the Strictly experience – and Len.

Wild Tales from the Village BBC2, 7.30pm

Documentary following the animals that live near a remote rural French village, including red squirrels, dormice and stone martens. As the wildlife struggles to survive the winter, they take full advantage of living so close to unsuspecting humans in their search for food, while trying not to be detected.

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BRAIN GYM No.408

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.

14	12	22	6	12	9		5	20	12	22	6	15
	15		18		18		20		7			22
	9		25	12	24	26	18	12	26	22	2	10
26	17	1	16		24	26			16			24
	17		8		9		6		8			2
7	26	16	21	17	15	15		15	2	16	17	
4		16				20			16		1	
12	23	17	15		26	17	19	18	17	13	15	
26			24		17		12		19		9	
16			12		3		26		12	9	12	15
5	20	12	8	24	16	21	18	17	1		19	
20			11		25		17		17		17	
17	23	2	12	9	17		15	12	1	18	15	25

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

C	S	K	H	N	P	T	U	B	J	A	X	R
E	F	L	Z	Y	O	M	W	G	I	Q	D	V

1	14
2	15
3	16 O
4	17
5	18
6	19
7	20
8	21
9	22
10	23
11	24
12	25
13	26 R

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

Cryptic Clues:

Across

- Helps to define the goal of angry lawyers (8)
- Pick out the place (4)
- It's important to one's standing as a rider (7)
- Meet and strive to make some display (13)
- One in a seaside feature breaks new ground (7)
- Crime that no tears can undo (7)
- Making an attempt to be difficult (6)
- Not a specific officer (7)
- Overhead lines (7)
- Serene number in tartan (6)
- A rash sort of girl (5)
- The ultimate in saltshakers (4)
- Living wages? (8)

Down

- Sounds like a private bitterness that's harboured (7)
- It's important to one's standing as a rider (7)
- Meet and strive to make some display (13)
- One in a seaside feature breaks new ground (7)
- Crime that no tears can undo (7)
- Making an attempt to be difficult (6)
- Not a specific officer (7)
- Overhead lines (7)
- Serene number in tartan (6)
- A rash sort of girl (5)
- The ultimate in saltshakers (4)
- Living wages? (8)

1	2		3			4		5	6		7
							8				
9					10						
11						12					
13		14		15				16		17	
18									19		
20								21			
22						23					

Quick Clues:

Across

- For common use (8)
- Lave (4)
- Sharp (4)
- Pertinent (8)
- Soothes (5)
- Building (7)
- Alluring beauty (13)
- Upright (8)
- Pit (4)
- Income (7)
- Wrath (5)
- Sediment (4)
- Remembered (8)

Down

- Total (7)
- Least (7)
- Retaliation (2,3,3,2,3)
- Greed (7)
- Heat (7)
- Careless (6)
- Rules (7)
- Coming (7)
- East (6)
- Titular (7)
- Genuine (7)

Sudoku

	9					8	
		3			9	6	7
1				4		2	5
		4	1		5		
5	2				3		6
		9	8		2	1	
4		7	3				6
		8	5			7	4
6				4		3	

Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

4	2	9	1	8	5	3	6	7
1	6	5	4	7	3	9	2	8
7	3	8	6	2	9	4	1	5
5	7	3	2	6	4	8	9	1
8	4	6	7	9	1	5	3	2
2	9	1	3	8	7	4	6	5
3	1	7	8	4	2	6	5	9
6	5	4	9	1	7	2	8	3
9	8	2	5	3	6	1	7	4

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS: CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Blench; 4 Hither; 9 Keep open house; 10 Natural; 11 Beech; 12 Jiffy; 14 Stare; 18 Armour; 19 Outcast; 21 Regimentation; 22 Tenant; 23 Stages. Down: 1 Baking; 2 Electric organ; 3 Choir; 5 Inhabit; 6 Housebreaking; 7 Re-echo; 8 Bells; 13 Fireman; 15 Carrot; 16 Bound; 17 Stands; 20 Tract. QUICK - Across: 1 Riddle; 4 Abound; 9 Dispassionate; 10 Clotted; 11 Incur; 12 Ducat; 14 Shame; 18 Erect; 19 Radiant; 21 Premeditation; 22 Resist; 23 Heyday. Down: 1 Reduce; 2 Dissoluteness; 3 Least; 5 Bookish; 6 Unaccompanied; 7 Dreary; 8 Aside; 13 Artless; 15 Helper; 16 Frail; 17 Stingy; 20 Drape.

Quiz

- How many gallons are there in a bushel?
- With which composer is the Malvern Festival associated?
- Who succeeded Robin Cook as Foreign Secretary in 2001?
- The Lourdes shrine is a shrine to which saint?
- What is a mandrill?
- Who won a Victoria Cross for leading the Dam Busters' raid?
- Which journalist wrote Princess In Love with the assistance of James Hewitt?
- Of which range do the Tatra Mountains form a part?
- What was Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I's nickname?
- In medicine, what does the acronym SIDS stand for?

Last week's solutions:

- Quiz: 1 Mitford sisters; 2 Sea lion; 3 Japan; 4 Arnold Wesker; 5 Modulator-demodulator; 6 Uma Thurman; 7 Plato; 8 City of London; 9 Requiesscat in pace; 10 St James.

Niner: ATROPHIES

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

- 56123 gives an African country,
4382564 gives a Eurasian country,
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The Lowry houses a gallery dedicated to the artist's work and two theatres



Salford Quays in all its night-time splendour



The Imperial War Museum North is a must-see attraction for Quays visitors



The Lowry Outlet mall is popular with shoppers

Nothing to match this Lowry spot as the Quay to brush up on history

By Mark Shipp

SO I saw this fellow in Manchester with a picture frame and asked him where he'd got it. "It fell off the back of a Lowry," he said.

Welcome to Salford, where the artist is key – or should that be quay? – to a great deal of what this corner of the north west has to offer.

Home to MediaCityUK, where 27,000 BBC staff are employed, and where ITV favourites such as Coronation Street are filmed, Salford Quays is a big draw.

An idyllic waterside destination, it boasts entertainment, arts culture, a myriad of places to eat and shop and attracts around seven million visitors a year, bringing in £400m to the local economy.

Located alongside the Manchester Ship Canal, the quays has a gallery dedicated to

the work of the painter LS Lowry, who has many pieces depicting the city's industrial landscape. It's a fascinating insight into his life and works, with video footage to boot. Visitors will see that there was more to the artist than his matchstick men figures, with seascapes a particular feature.

The Lowry also houses two theatres and a drama studio. With its 1,730 seats, the Lyric also has the largest stage of any UK theatre outside London. My partner and I were treated to a show at the smaller venue, The Quays, with the terrific Opus 7 combining circus acts with accomplished musicianship.

For our short break, we stayed at the four-star Copthorne Hotel, enjoying its comfortable rooms and views overlooking the quayside. It is ideally located, being less than a mile away from the top tourist at-

tractions, which also include the Imperial War Museum North and the Lowry shopping outlet, housing the likes of M&S, Body Shop and Gap.

Just a short walk across the canal took us to all these major sights. But if football is your thing, you cannot escape the shadow of Old Trafford – home to the Salford lot, as I like to call them.

Rooftop

There, fans can enjoy the Manchester United Museum and tour, while Hotel Football, the world's first soccer-themed hotel is located opposite the stadium and offers matchday hospitality and a rooftop football pitch.

The award-winning Imperial War Museum North is an absolute must, particularly in such a poignant year of the Battle of the Somme's centenary. From a timeline

of conflicts, to talks and displays, it provides an important lesson for children, to learn of the sacrifices made and about genuine times of hardship and fighting spirit.

The exhibition, Fashion on the Ration: 1940s street style gave a glimpse at military uniforms and how civilians dressed throughout the decade.

Further sightseeing is on offer with cruises along the canal. And if venturing into Manchester itself, call in at Ziferblat.

A Russian concept, Ziferblat is a pay-as-you-go cafe where everything is free, except for the time spent in there. For 6p a minute, one can help themselves to as much tea, cake and biscuits as they want, chill out with their laptops or even play board games. But do your own washing up.

One of only three UK cities where a Ziferblat can be found, it is located in Edge Street in the city's northern quarter.



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Be ready for winter weather problems

It might look pretty, but snow can be troublesome for homeowners. Ella Walker reveals her top tips for weather-proofing your home

BRICKS AND MORTAR

Check your roof for broken tiles and damaged bricks. Get these fixed now, before snow gets in the cracks and causes more trouble and leaks.

CHECK THE GUTTERS

Clean out gutters, so ice doesn't collect and form in them.

SALTY SUPPLIES

Stock up on salt or sand for use on paths and outside steps (don't use it on lawns or flowerbeds though, as plants don't like it).

DON'T FORGET THE GARDEN

Bring pot plants inside and mulch outdoor plants and trees that don't appreciate the frost.

PREPARE PIPES

Insulate water pipes and taps, inside and out, to keep them warm and prevent them from freezing as temperatures drop.

If they do freeze, thaw them out with a hairdryer.

PLAN AHEAD

Drain and disconnect hoses, and loop and hang them neatly so you don't trip over them covered in snow.

Clear the lawn of debris and garden toys/tools to prevent them becoming obstacles too.

ESSENTIAL TOOL

Invest in a snow shovel and keep it close at hand, in the porch, or inside the shed or garage door, so it's ready at the first sign of snow.

LOFTY HEIGHTS

Check the insulation and ventilation in your loft. If it's too warm up there, when it snows, the snow can melt on the roof, which can cause issues because of how heavy it is, and then trickle down and reform as 'ice dams' in your guttering, causing blockages.

CLEAR DRAINS

Make sure outside drains are clear, if they're blocked now before snow, they'll certainly overflow and become blocked when winter hits.

CUT BACK TREES

Get any overhanging branches that, when covered in snow, may affect your property, lopped off.

Same goes for excess leaves, which will all happily collect snow.

PLAY IT SAFE

If you're going to be lighting fires and candles indoors, make sure you install carbon monoxide and smoke detectors, and that existing ones are working.

STAY WARM

Keep the heating on for at least an hour a day to keep water running through the pipes, and the house warm against the freezing weather outside.



Dream homes

MORE than one in four people would not be willing to give up their annual holiday even if it meant they could afford their dream home, a survey has found.

And one in six (15 per cent) people would not forego their regular trips to the pub to buy a new property.

Many would also be unwilling to sacrifice a nice car, beauty treatments, their expensive tastes in wine or the help they receive around the home from a gardener or a cleaner in order to buy a new property.

The research, from property expert Sarah Beeny, found people spend £203 each month on average on non-essentials like nights out, trips away and visits to the gym. An annual holiday was found to be the "luxury" that people were least willing to give up in order to pay for a new home, with 27 per cent of those surveyed being reluctant to do this.

Some 23 per cent of those surveyed would not abstain from dining out to buy a home, one in five (20 per cent) would be reluctant to give up buying new clothes and 17% would not want to give up nights out with friends. Some 16 per cent would not give up weekends away to buy a home and the same proportion also said they would not ditch their favourite hobbies.

Around one in six (15 per cent) would not give up trips to the gym and 13 per cent would not scale back their trips to the hairdresser, the survey of 2,000 people from across the UK found.

Despite the reluctance to give up little luxuries, 27 per cent of those surveyed would spend under 40 per cent of their monthly income on mortgage payments.

By Julia Gray

LOTS of family homes are under strain, with adult kids who can't afford to leave and elderly parents who need support, so can you adapt your home to suit everyone?

1. It's important to think through all your family's needs when adapting and expanding your home, because doing the wrong home improvements can be an expensive mistake.

I know a couple, for example, who are trying to force their starter home into being a family home now that they have three children. They've converted the loft into a bedroom and built a home office in the back garden, but the office takes up half the garden and the house is top heavy, with too many bedrooms for the amount of living space downstairs.

They've spent a lot of money, but not necessarily on the right home improvements – or the right house.

2. Open-plan living space (usually a kitchen-diner/family room) is what most families want because it's great for entertaining and enables everyone to be together, but doing different things if they want.

The key to successful open-plan space is to divide it into different 'zones', so you have clearly defined areas for cooking, dining, sitting, studying, etc.

Open-plan kitchen-diners/family rooms are often achieved by knocking two or more rooms into one and adding a ground-floor extension, which isn't cheap but can be a lifesaver in busy multi-generational homes.

Separating living space, such as a more formal sitting room away from the hustle and bustle of family life, can also be ideal for some family members.

3. If you have three or more generations living under one roof, dividing up the house horizontally for sleeping is often the best solution.

Having mum and dad in a loft conversion with an en suite, the kids on the first floor with the family bathroom, and the grandparents on the ground floor with a bathroom, shower room or wet room, is a great arrangement, if there's enough space.

Loft conversions can be done successfully in all sorts of homes, but finding space for a ground-floor bedroom and bathroom, shower room or wet room can be more of a challenge.

4. A downstairs cloakroom, comprising a toilet and basin, is a must in family homes, and sometimes even a small cloakroom can be turned into a shower room or wet room for elderly family members who struggle to get up the stairs.

When the cloakroom is too tiny for a shower tray, opt for a wet room, where the whole room effectively becomes the shower tray. The only problem is that wet rooms can be expensive because of the waterproofing and tiling involved.

5. Many homes have a separate loo and bathroom. This is a dated layout, but can work better in multi-generational homes than knocking the two rooms together, because a separate loo can still be used when someone's in the bathroom.

Separate loos rarely have basins, though, so fitting a small one, such as the Wickes Mode Compact Vanity Unit with Basin (£200, Wickes), is a really good idea.

Nothing can lead to family tensions more than queues for the loo or shower, especially when everyone's getting ready at the same time, so getting the plumbing right can go a long way to creating multi-generational harmony.

Experience

An architect is the obvious person to help with major home improvements, but how do you find the right one for you?

1. While architects can be expensive, they don't have to be and their knowledge and experience can be worth its weight in gold. As well as offering design expertise, architects can add value in lots of ways.

They have technical knowledge, can help you negotiate the building regulations, party wall and planning process and can manage the project from start to finish, if you want them to, including finding and managing tradespeople and consultants. As they use these people regularly for projects, they may be able to get better prices than you can. They can help financially in other ways, too, such as devising the best design for your budget, improving energy efficiency and increasing your home's saleability and value.



It's important to think through all your family's needs when adapting and expanding your home



Some families may have three or more generations under one roof



Open plan living enables everyone to be together

2. A good first step is to go to the 'find an architect' section of the Royal Institute of British Architects' (RIBA) website - www.architecture.com.

When you've found some suitable candidates, find out if they're interested in your project and what sort of ideas and relevant experience they have.

If you can see similar projects they've done, this will give you a good idea of what to expect. It's also important to have a good relationship with your architect, as how you get on and work together can play a big part in the success, or not, of the project.

3. Once you've chosen an architect, drawing up a contract and giving them a clear brief is vital. Also establish how you'll be paying them.

Some architects take a percentage of the total cost of the project, some charge per hour for the time they spend on it, and others charge a flat fee.

4. Your chosen architect should send you draft plans so you can see if they've under-

stood what you want or not. If you'd like changes to the plans, make sure you see the revised versions before they're sent to the local council for planning permission - in my experience, miscommunication between you and your architect is all too easy.

Your architect will also need to draw up plans for your builder and building control inspector - don't get builders round for quotes until you have these plans because they won't be able to work out the cost of the project.

5. If the prospect of finding and employing an architect seems too daunting, some building companies will do it for you. Loft-conversion specialists, for example, usually offer a complete renovation package, including the services of an architect, which makes life easier for you.

TOP PRODUCT

Lots of surfaces need to be primed before being painted, as this helps the topcoat adhere.

Primer can also stop the surface being too absorbent and makes shiny surfaces matte.

If you don't want to buy lots of different primers, Ronseal All Surface Primer & Undercoat Exterior (from £9.97 with free delivery, Amazon) is ideal because it can be used on stone, wood, brick, terracotta and most metals. It needs a really good stir before you use it, but dries quickly so you can crack on with the job, and it's guaranteed to make the topcoat last longer.

HOW-TO TIP

Once the tin's opened, oil-based paints soon develop a visible 'skin' on top, so make sure you remove it before stirring the paint or you'll get bits in it, which is very annoying when you use it. A similar thing can happen with water-based paints, although you won't be able to see the skin. Keep the lid on tightly as much as possible and a skin shouldn't form, but if it does and the paint's full of bits, try straining it.

Great ideas for gifts to delight the gardener

As the festive season draws near, it's time to think about gifts for the gardener. Hannah Stephenson digs out some of the best

GREEN-FINGERED friends and family may have precision tools, pampering presents or ornamental must-haves on their Christmas wish lists, and indeed there is the perfect gift for gardeners out there – you just have to find it.

Plant theatre: Stage a spectacular display of your favourite flowers with this plant theatre made from aged metal, which will distress beautifully over time. No assembly required, the theatre just folds out and can be folded away for easy storage if required (£95, www.miafleur.com).

Dutch plant pots: Put pizzazz back into your patio with these eye-catching blue Dutch plant pots made from glazed clay. They sit as easily indoors as they do outside (set of three, £32.95, www.miafleur.com).

Snazzy wellies: Floral print ankle wellies are ideal for stylish gardeners who want to show their feminine side. These are fully waterproof with soft wool lining for extra warmth and comfort. (£19.99, www.mountainware-house.com)

Hip-trug: This new innovation can store debris, garden produce or light tools, clipping easily to a belt, pocket or waistband, leaving both hands free for gardening jobs (£9.95, www.burgonandball.com).

Lovely labels: Add style to your allotment, vegetable plot, kitchen garden or greenhouse plants with these slate-style blackboard labels, which are actually made from wood but look like traditional slate. Each pack of 10 Blackboard Labels comes with a weather-proof white pencil for easy marking of names, varieties and other information. You can rub out the details at the end of the season and start again (£7.95, www.har-rodhorticultural.com).

Razor hoe: This is one of the most useful tools on the block, especially if you tend to do your weeding on your knees. It draws through the soil towards you, chopping and removing weeds in its path and prising stubborn weeds from between block paving (£14.95, www.burgonandball.com).

The garden chair: Fit for a gardening king or queen, this beautifully crafted redwood chair will create an eye-catching focal point for any garden space and can be engraved either with one of the standard options such as 'Head Gardener' or 'The Boss', or with a personalised engraving (£570, www.theposhshedcompany.co.uk).

Corsica doorstopper: This clever container features a slot for a patio door, to stop it slamming. Fill it with your favourite plants to camouflage the fact it's actually an ideal door stop. Comes in eight colours, white, terra, taupe, liver, black, cherry, lime green, vintage blue and mint. (£14.99, from garden centres. For stockist details, visit www.elho.com)

Discovery box: New from The Seed Pantry, this monthly subscription grow club discovery box is designed for those who are keen to grow food and flowers at home, delivered at the right time to grow. You receive monthly boxes of your own choice of seeds, bulbs or plants and grow guides. Gifting options will be available for three, six and 12 month subscriptions (£12.99 per month, first box £6.99, www.seedpantry.co.uk).

Man-size barbecue: Now enjoy barbecuing on-the-go with this Wild & Wolf portable barbecue in a lightweight mini suitcase. Comes emblazoned with the words: "The Adventure Begins" (£54.95, www.blooms-burystore.com).

Flower candle: The ultimate pampering gift when you're soaking in the bath after a long day's digging is this beautifully scented Jo Malone Peony & Moss charity candle, of which 75% of all proceeds goes to support its charity garden projects nationwide (£44, www.jomalone.co.uk).

Christmas Scent: Bring garden fragrance into the home with this diffuser which will fill your room with the aroma of zesty orange with a dash of cinnamon, nutmeg and clove to create a banquet of enchanting, spicy fragrances (£25, at www.heylandandwhittle.co.uk).

Tough axe to follow: Want a real wood fire over the festive season? Fiskars, a leading Finnish producer of exclusive quality gardening tools, offers a range of Next Generation axes to make wood chopping easier (from £44.99, from garden centres, DIY stores and online, or visit www.fiskars.co.uk/support/store-locator).



Kalanchoe (Saxifragales Crassulaceae Kalanchoe) has bright flowers

Bright blooms available at all times of the year

BEST OF THE BUNCH – Kalanchoe

THIS pretty houseplant used to be bought as a Christmas-flowering gift plant, but now it is available in flower all year round.

K. blossfeldiana, a succulent native to Madagascar, is popular during the festive season because of its clusters of colourful blooms which can last around six to eight weeks, in colours of white, yellow, orange, lilac, pink or red blooms, borne in large heads on 30cm-high plants with succulent deep green leaves. Named varieties include 'Bali' and 'Vesuvius', which are both red, and the orange-flowered 'Tarantella'. Kalanchoes like bright light, but not direct sunlight, so avoid placing them on very sunny windowsills. They need an average warmth of around 50C in winter. The most common mistake is to overwater them, so let the surface soil dry out between watering and they should last you through the festive season and beyond.

GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT – Horseradish

THIS fiery vegetable makes the horseradish sauce that goes so well with roast beef and, in more recent times, has become popular in mayonnaise to accompany smoked salmon dishes.

It's easy to grow, but is best cultivated in a bottomless bucket as it's an invasive perennial with deep roots which regrow when they are broken off. Buy the plants from specialist herb nurseries, dig a hole to house the bottomless bucket, leaving 2.5cm of the bucket above the surface so the roots are contained. Refill the bucket with compost and push a cane into the soil to make a hole, then feed a single long, thin root into it, leaving the tip at ground level. Plant three roots 60cm apart in a triangular shape for a good clump. You need to wait two years before collecting your first crop.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

1. Put a floating ball or a piece of polystyrene in ponds to stop the water freezing.
2. Stake Brussels sprouts with sturdy canes and remove dead or dying leaves around the bottom of plants.
3. Do some weeding if the ground is soft enough, to give you a head start for spring.
4. Fill border gaps with new perennials.
5. Move plants which don't work in their current spot while they are dormant, but the ground is still workable.

Find the right tree for your home and budget

By Hannah Stephenson

IF you've dusted off your tree stand, got your baubles out and are surrounded by sparkling tinsel, it must be almost time to put the Christmas tree up.

Garden centres generally start stocking trees towards the end of November, while The British Christmas Tree Growers Association (BCTGA) recommends getting them from December 1 onwards. It seems the middle of the festive season, the third Sunday after Advent (December 11) is a good compromise.

The fresher the tree, the more likely it is to last through the festive season without dropping its needles or looking a little tired.

While the most common type of tree is still the Nordmann fir – which accounts for 80% of trees sold – there are some that might better suit your available space and budget.

"Bear in mind the size of the room and the weight of the tree," says David Mitchell, plant buyer for Wyevale Garden Centres. "A lot of Christmas trees are sold by height, so make sure you've got the roof space for it and don't end up having to cut a section off the top."

"Some trees have a lighter structure. We sell a Swedish-style Nordmann which is lighter. We select the trees in the field and prune them to have a lighter feel, which suits a lot of customers. They are good if you want to experiment with larger decorations or you want to see light coming through the tree. They have more of a layered structure, and they are cheaper than the denser trees."

The four main types of tree on offer this year are Nordmann fir, Fraser fir, Noble fir and Norway spruce, each of which has its own characteristics.

Northmann fir (Abies nordmanniana)

The most popular tree, it won't drop its needles for the duration of the festive season and people love it because of its dense branches, uniform shape and good variety of sizes. Expect to pay from about £20 upwards, depending on size.

Fraser fir (Abies fraseri)

This is ideal for those with limited space, who want a real Christmas tree. It's a slim tree, so you're less likely to brush past it and knock off decorations in a smaller room, but it also has a great shape and fresh citrus scent, and its dark olive-green needles don't drop. It's likely to be more expensive than the Nordmann, and there won't be as many available as it's a more difficult tree to grow commercially, says Mitchell.

Noble fir (Abies procera)

Consumers buy this tree primarily for its blue-hued needle colour and rich fragrance. It's non-drop, but is unlikely to be as uniformly shaped as the Nordmann. This tree is ideal for individuals who don't conform to conventional shapes and sizes of trees.

Norway spruce (Picea abies)

This is the traditionalist's tree. It may shed its needles, but what it loses in lon-



Buy your tree fresh – get it early before the trees have been left standing in the garden centre a week or longer



Consider how much room you have for a tree before you buy

gevity it gains in scent. It's a good tree if you're putting it up last minute, or at least closer to Christmas, because it won't last as long as the more expensive non-drop trees.

Alternatives

There are twiggly alternatives – if you haven't space, decorate containerised olive or pyramid-trained bay trees or standard holly bushes and put them outside your front door or on a balcony, anywhere outside where you get a good view of them.

Ideally, buy from a local grower. Visit the British Christmas Tree Growers Association website (www.bctga.co.uk) to check out members locally. Alternatively, good garden centres should have plenty of trees from which to choose. Wyevale (www.wyevalegardencentres.co.uk) sources 95% of its trees from the UK and Ireland.

Tree Tips

David Mitchell offers the following tips to keep your tree going through the festive season:

Buy it fresh – he recommends getting it early before the trees have been left standing in the garden centre a week or longer.



The most common type of tree is the Nordmann fir

When you bring it home, cut a couple of centimetres off the trunk and dunk it in a bucket of water, leaving it outside until you need it.

Buy from a retailer who will remove it from its netting. You want to see the shape of it before you buy. Sometimes a micro-climate builds up within trees which have been netted for any length of time, which can make trees drop their needles earlier.

Put the tree into a stand which can hold water. Water it regularly.

Try to keep the tree in the cool and definitely away from direct heat.



Highland-inspired luxury featuring stags, faux fur and rustic charm

Opt for log cabin chic with some comfy throws and cheerful cushions

Luxury Inflatable Guest Bed, £199.99, Bensonsforbeds.co.uk

Spare room sparkle



Oregon Sofa Bed, £1,299 (double), Multiyork



Your guests can eat, drink and be merry – in comfort – with a few stylish additions to your spare room



Lexington Photoprint cushion, £49, Houseology.com



Why not add a cocktail cabinet for the grown-ups



Your spare room could become Santa's Grotto

POOR old spare room. It spends most of the year as an understudy to other 'headlining' living areas, and never seems to get the chance to take centre stage – waiting in the wings, hankering to be filled with something more exciting than household junk.

But hark! The holiday season is (almost) in full swing; sleigh bells are ringing, invitations have been extended to family and friends and, it's likely to be a full house on Christmas Day.

Finally, the spare room has its moment to shine! But before the curtains are up and it's show time, why not give it a spruce up?

A few little touches might be all it takes...

SLEEP LIKE A YULE LOG

"Transforming a chaotic spare room into a cosy guest bedroom may seem like a daunting task, but with a few simple changes, it's easy to create a homely space where guests can relax and unwind," says Kate Tansley, creative director at Multiyork.

"Space-saving and versatile, a sofa bed is a great way to accommodate family and friends in any size of home, and will allow a space to function not just as a guest bedroom, but as a home office or snug too.

By Sam Wylie-Harris

"With a huge variety of styles, sizes and customisable options available, it's also easier than ever to find one that matches your decor scheme," says Tansley.

And when it comes to finishing touches, a well-made bed with a cosy throw and an array of festive scatter cushions, will create a comfy and inviting look that will instantly make the in-laws feel welcome.

Add a few simple necessities, such as guest towels, and some festive treats – maybe a wreath above the bed, a pine-scented candle and some mince pies (along with a tawny port) on a pretty plate, and guests will feel super-pampered.

Alternatively, an inflatable guest bed (with the latest comfort-enhancing technology) will gift your guests a great night's sleep; especially if you invest in a plump, thick duvet with a high tog count, so you don't have to worry about having the central heating blasting all night long.

There's plenty of winter wonderland-themed bed linen and accessories, or Nordic-style designs – ideal for Christmas – around right now. :: Oregon Sofa Bed, £1,299 (double), Multiyork (available in store, or visit the website to find nearest stockists; www.multiyork.co.uk)

:: Lexington Striped Poplin Duvet Set Bed, from £119; Lexington Printed Sateen Duvet

Set in White/Blue, from £119; Lexington Striped Bed Blanket in White/Blue, from £239; Lexington Quilt Bedspread in Red Multi, from £395; Lexington Bear Sham, £79; Lexington Merry Christmas Sham, £49, all Houseology (www.houseology.com)

:: Highland Red Check Luxury Cotton Duvet Set, from £25; Highland Stag Filled Boudoir Cushion, currently reduced to £12 from £40; Dakota Stone Luxury Faux Fur Filled Square Cushion, currently reduced to £12 from £40; Dakota Stone Luxury Faux Fur Throw, currently reduced to £50 from £170, Julian Charles (www.juliancharles.co.uk)

:: Aerobed Luxury Inflatable Guest Bed, from £199.99, Bensons for Beds (www.bensonsforbeds.co.uk)

:: Snuggledown Double Ultimate Luxury Duvet 13.5 Tog, currently from £82.07, Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk)

:: Lexington Photoprint Snow Sham, £49, Houseology (www.houseology.com)

NAUGHTY OR NICE

Children star at Christmas, and there's nothing more adorable than watching them unwrap their presents and hearing their squeals of delight. But all this excitement can be exhausting, and building a special space to keep them entertained will be a lifesaver for busy mums and dads (and grandmas and grandpas).

"Creating a festive-themed room suitable for children is easy with our cute and cuddly winter animal favourites, adorned on warming

brushed cotton bedding to stay snug and cosy," says Katie Glenn, interiors expert at Julian Charles. "Layer with soft faux mohair and fur throws and cushions for extra comfort, and add the perfect finishing touches with Christmas themed accessories."

Nothing says Christmas like twinkling fairy lights – an easy way to create a magical atmosphere kids will love. Once they've opened their stockings, why not fill them with torn wrapping paper, and arrange them next to their favourite cuddly toys? That way, they have their own festive play area to snuggle up in for a snooze, or show off their new presents.

:: Snowy Penguin Stocking, currently reduced to £12.60 from £18, The White Company (www.thewhitecompany.com)

:: Perpetual Santa Claus Wooden Stand-up Calendar, currently reduced to £6.50 from £9.50, Julian Charles (www.juliancharles.co.uk)

:: Small Shabby Chic Wooden Christmas Stag Decoration, currently reduced to £3.99 from £6, or a Large one, currently reduced to £6.99 from £10, Julian Charles (www.juliancharles.co.uk)

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

The run-up to the big day's been hectic, you've had an early start – and treasure that moment when you can finally sit down with a nice glass of red by the fire... There's no reason why the spare room can't be transformed into a cleverly curated 'cocktail bar' and snug room

for grown-ups.

A cosy armchair, mini fir tree, fairy lights around the window frames, plus a sumptuous throw, some scented candles and a cocktail cabinet, will add ambience and a festive feel that's best bar none (and beats retreating to the loo for some peace and quiet!).

And if you suddenly have to accommodate a surprise guest after Happy Hour or the Queen's Speech, a bed that folds out of a box – such as The Hettty from sofa.com – can double up as a pouffe with a tray of champagne flutes, before it's turned into a blissful bed where they can turn in for the night.

:: Christmas Penguin Cushion, currently reduced to £10 from £35; Eat, Drink And Be Merry Cushion, currently reduced to £10 from £35, Julian Charles (other items stylist's own; www.juliancharles.co.uk)

:: The Hettty Bed in a Box in Claret Pure Cotton Matt Velvet, £760, Sofa.com (www.sofa.com)

:: Logan White Drinks Cabinet, £185, Next (barware stylist's own; www.next.co.uk);

:: Set of 4 Metallic Wine Glasses, £24, Next (www.next.co.uk)

:: Yankee Candle Set of 2 USA Special Winter Woodland Large Jars, £35, QVC (www.qvcuk.com)

:: By Sainsbury's Cream Cable Knit With Faux Fur Trim Throw, £30, Sainsbury's (available at larger Sainsbury's stores; www.sainsbury.co.uk)

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Pilot and Titan explore strange new worlds in Respawn and EA's Titanfall 2 – and try to survive in them

Video game titans battle it out with action franchises

GAMERS have a better than ever choice of action games after the major companies surpassed themselves by literally unleashing their big guns in readiness for the season of goodwill – and console carnage – to all men (and women!).

Several of the top titles are sequels but, reversing the usual trend of diminishing returns, these games actually improve upon, or at least match, the originals.

Titanfall 2 is the follow-up to 2014's multi-award winner Titanfall and places you back in the thick of the action as a pilot in the galactic civil war between the Militia and the IMC. You can call upon a Titan, a hulking cross between a Transformers-like robot and a walking tank.

The single player campaign is shorter but more exciting than the original, with you as rookie pilot Jack, trapped behind enemy lines on a hostile alien planet after a mission goes badly wrong.

It is in multi-player that developers Respawn have really pulled out all the stops with strange new worlds, more powerful weapons and bigger, better Titans for when the robots get ready to rumble. The whole experience has been upgraded. The rocket-powered grappling hook is likely to be a favourite innovation, letting you soar through the sci-fi landscapes like Spiderman.

Steampunk

Dishonored 2 takes fans of 2012 stealth hit Dishonored back to Dunwall and the Empire of the Isles. It's 15 years after the events of the original game and Empress Emily Kaldwin is now ruling with the help of her father Corvo Attano, Dishonored's hero. She is usurped by a witch-like aunt and you must then choose to play as Emma or Corvo for the rest of the game.

It's an action-packed sequel with new supernatural abilities to discover and use, set in a superbly realised pseudo-Victorian steampunk world. Is it better than the original? Maybe not, but it matches it for thrills and imagination. When a game was this popular, more of a good thing is welcome.

Battlefield 1 is actually a prequel, going back to the First World War to reboot the popular war game franchise. Most non-gamers probably think you have to suspend your maturity as soon as you press play on a Battlefield or Call Of Duty game. But, amid all the slaughter, Battlefield 1 actually has thoughtful moments. Just moments.

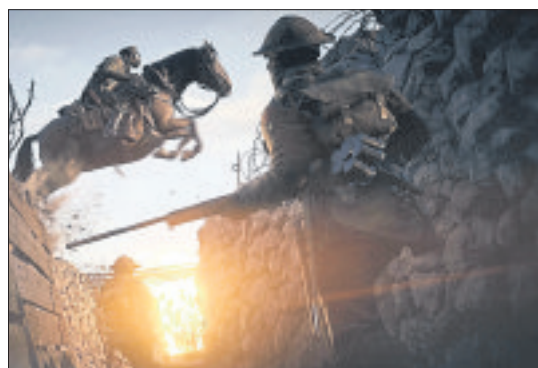
In the first scenes, when you wake up again and again in the trenches, overwhelmed by the Kaiser's hordes, the game drives home the message that many soldiers didn't stand a chance. One skirmish ends with you facing a lone German soldier, and both of you decide to drop your weapon. Point made, a huge world of war opens up with choices of campaign ranging from the Western Front, to dogfights in the skies, war in the Alps, the Gallipoli campaign or the chance to fight alongside Lawrence of Arabia in the desert. Multi-player can involve up to 64 combatants.

If you are a Batman fan, Warner Bros' Batman: Return To Arkham is a treat. It packages together remastered versions of Arkham Asylum and Arkham City.

The Bat's twisted gothic world has never looked better as he confronts his most dangerous enemies, The Joker, Harley Quinn, Killer Croc, The Penguin, Bane and Poison Ivy, plus the unpredictable Catwoman. All these games are for older gamers and are available on a variety of platforms but were reviewed on Xbox One by Leon Burakowski.



Why why why Aunt Delilah? The witch grabs the throne in Dishonored 2



A War Horse moment from Battlefield 1, the war game's reboot



The chokes on you Joker, says Batman, from Return To Arkham



Ford Fiesta topped the sales chart

2016 on track for record registrations

It's set to be a record-breaking year for the British new car market as registrations passed the 2.5 million mark in November.

Steady 2.9 per cent market growth pushed total year-to-date sales up to 2.51m – the highest level ever seen in November.

Much of this growth was fuelled by alternatively fuelled vehicles such as electric cars and plug-in hybrids, which saw demand up 25.1 per cent compared with November 2015.

Petrol registrations grew, too, up 7.9 per cent compared with the same month last year, while diesel registrations fell slightly, down by 2.9 per cent.


As usual, the Ford Fiesta topped the sales charts, despite Ford revealing the popular supermini's replacement. A surprising sales success, though, was the Vauxhall Astra, which out-sold the VW Golf by around 170 units to nip into second spot.

With 112,327 units registered since January 1, the Fiesta continues to lead the year-to-date sales table, too, having sold 39,155 units more than its closest rival, the Vauxhall Corsa, by the end of November. The Ford Focus and VW Golf continue to fight it out for third spot, with the Focus currently leading by just over 1,400 units.

Mike Hawes, chief executive of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, said: "Our industry continues to make vehicles that are ever safer, more refined, more efficient and more enjoyable to drive – and the latest advanced technology and cutting-edge designs are continuing to attract buyers into showrooms.

"It's encouraging to see that alternatively fuelled vehicles, although still a small proportion of the market, have seen strong growth this month achieving a record market share. Long-term government support and incentives are essential if these vehicles are to command a larger market share in the future."

Three-millionth MINI rolls off production line



Celebrating MINI production at Oxford

MINI Plant Oxford has celebrated a significant milestone with the three millionth example of the popular car rolling off the production line.

The plant has manufactured three million MINI cars since 2001, with 80 per cent of Oxford MINIs built for export across the world.

The three-millionth MINI to come off the production line was a John Cooper Works Clubman, the most powerful MINI Clubman ever made.

The milestone has also fallen within BMW's centenary year, and MINI's 15th year of production.

Oliver Zipse, member of the board of management of BMW AG, responsible for production, said while visiting the plant: "It's great to be back in Oxford to mark this fantastic MINI production milestone. Since we began building MINI's back in 2001 the car has proved to be hugely popular with customers right around the world.

"The passion and commitment that everyone here at the plant has for building a high-quality product is central to that success. The three millionth Oxford-built is a remarkable achievement. Congratulations to everyone who has played their part in making this celebration possible."

Since 2000, £1.75bn has been invested by BMW in the three UK MINI production plants in Hams Hill near Birmingham, Swindon and Oxford.

Frank Bachmann, managing director of Plant Oxford, said: "Hitting this milestone is a fantastic achievement for everyone on the team here at Oxford. Building the volume of high-quality cars that we have over the past 15 years is something everyone working here can be very proud of."

Lacking excitement on the gallop for this Italian stallion

By James Baggott

CALIFORNIA T HANDLING SPECIALE, FROM £155,244

Meet the California T HS – the tweaked version of the manufacturer's folding hard-top family Ferrari.

With two seats in the back for small children and a V8 turbo-charged lump up front, this is the convertible Italian supercar for those that need to carry more than one significant other. New for the Handling Speciale model are some stiffer springs, louder exhaust and some ever-so-subtle design tweaks – which you'll be charged £5,568 to add to an ever-expanding list of options.

The California is aimed at a certain type of buyer and, as such, it has the ability to disappoint behind the wheel, unless you drive it in context. This is a GT car designed for comfort, looks and kerb appeal much before driving appeal, unlike its thoroughbred 488 stable mate. That means it's more comfortable than exciting to drive. Even with the louder exhaust system on this HS model, on the road we found it just a little too quiet.

In fact, we found the California lacked a lot of the excitement you'd expect to find in a Ferrari – despite its impressive performance credentials, it just didn't feel as involving as we'd hoped. That said, it was certainly a comfortable companion over distance and never failed to draw a crowd whenever we parked it up. The quality of its build is without question too – perfectly demonstrated with a wonderfully dramatic roof mechanism.

OK, so a Ferrari isn't going to win any accessibility awards like a Citroen Berlingo might, however this is a sports car and comes with sports car compromises. Put the front seats back to anything less than a knee crushing position and you lose all rear legroom – which means even carrying a five-year-old requires the front seat passengers to perform some gymnastics for the journey. The boot is pretty cramped too. If you don't want to use the roof, you get a little more space, but if you do, then you'll be refined to two small bags at best. Weekly shopper, this isn't.

For long-distance motorway journeys, the California T HS is a comfy drive. The 552bhp turbo-charged V8 has impressive breadth to its power delivery and although the feeling of acceleration is somewhat numbed in the cabin, it can hit 60mph in just 3.6 seconds. Sadly, the turbo engine loses some of the charms of a normally aspirated unit – it may offer improved performance, but sadly lacks some of the aural pleasure you expect from a Ferrari.

Those stiffer springs and louder exhaust come into play when you select the 'Sport' setting on the manettino switch on the steering wheel. Hit the bumpy road button on the steering wheel too and you'll be rewarded with a compliant ride that's just about perfect for our rutted roads. A parking camera makes backing the Ferrari into spaces a



A GT car designed for comfort, looks and kerb appeal much before driving appeal

pretty simple affair and, despite its sports car credentials, the visibility isn't too bad either.

The California T Handling Speciale costs £155,244 – pitching it against the Audi R8 Spyder and Porsche 911 Turbo Cabriolet. But that base price soon increases once you start ticking some options boxes. Two-tone exterior (£4,320), carbon fibre dash inserts (£3,744), Scuderia Ferrari side shields (£1,056) and front and rear parking cameras (£4,032) are just a few of the options that can soon add up. In fact, our test car had no less than 29 options added – including titanium wheel bolts at £1,810 – which pushed the purchase price up to a staggering £215,011. That's a whopping £59,767 on extras.

One well worth adding, though, is Apple CarPlay (£2,400) which makes the infotainment system far more usable. Ferrari's standard system isn't a match for the likes of Audi or Porsche, so the addition of Apple's integrated software is well worth selecting.

California buyers are family men or women who need the occasional flexibility of carrying more than one passenger. OK, so that might mean compromising on space for everyone, but at least there's the option there should they need it.



The boot is cramped – no weekly shopper!

BMW XDrive could keep you safe

With the winter months practically here, you might be noticing that the roads are getting a little bit more dicey. Routes can quickly become wet, slippery and tricky to navigate, especially in rural areas.

Two-wheel-drive cars can often struggle here – especially those with the power sent to just the rear wheels – which is why many manufacturers offer four-wheel-drive versions of their most popular models.

One such car maker is BMW, which applies four-wheel-drive technology to many of the cars in its range. It calls this system XDrive.

BMW introduced its first all-wheel drive model in 1985, with the 325i 'Allrad'. This utilised visco locks, which could create a strong connection between the front and rear wheels. It did this by monitoring which wheel slipped and which gripped, and adjusting the power sent to each one accordingly. This was the first time that the German car maker had thought to implement an all-wheel-drive system into a standard road car body, and the idea stuck.

Fast forward to 2016, and BMW is now using an all-wheel-drive system that is at the very cutting edge of technology, giving people a car that is usable in all weathers – not just in the dry.

XDrive is a system that sends power to all four wheels constantly. This is split as 40 per cent of the drive going to the front wheels, with the remainder put through the rears.

However, things don't stop there. An on-board computer constantly monitors each wheel for levels of grip and can adjust the power being sent to them accordingly.

What does that mean? Well, for example, if you hit a patch of wet leaves on the inside of a left-hand bend, the car's system can send more of the engine's drive to the outside wheels, keeping you stable throughout the corner. It's an ideal solution to winter roads, which can often upset a two-wheel-drive car. And should snow fall, there's a little more traction to be had here, too.

Does this have an effect on economy? Yes, but not as much as you'd think. For instance, a standard 320d will achieve around 65mpg combined.

For the XDrive model you'll see around a 10mpg penalty, which isn't bad considering the extra capability it affords you. Throughout the range, you won't see too much of a difference between economy figures – in either petrol or diesel models.

If you're considering the purchase of a



A BMW car featuring XDrive technology might be for you

four-wheel-drive, but aren't sure about the size increase that comes with an SUV, then a BMW car featuring XDrive technology might be for you.

It allows you to keep the usable size and shape of a standard car, while having greater levels of capability on difficult terrain and in different conditions.

Make no mistake however, these cars aren't suited to heavy off-roading, having been designed specifically for the road.

Skoda to the four . . . award-winners

By James Parker

ŠKODA's remarkable awards collection has been added to once again with no fewer than four new titles. The Citigo, Fabia, Yeti and Superb have all been named as the best in class by CarBuyer – one of the UK's most respected online motoring websites.

Unlike many industry awards, CarBuyer avoids the jargon that comes with traditional sectors and categories, concentrating instead on the kind of criteria that real-world motorists use when buying a car.

The Citigo was named Best First Car for the second year running, confirming its status as one of the most affordable and easy to drive small cars in the business.

Value

Commenting on the award, CarBuyer editor Stuart Milne said: "With prices starting at less than £8,300 and a range of stunning finance deals, it's great value to buy, and with 68.9mpg fuel economy possible and insurance groups as low as 1E, its running costs are among the lowest in the business."

Not to be outdone by its smaller sibling, the Fabia saw off strong competition to be named Best Small Car. The CarBuyer judges praised the supermini's refinement and high equipment levels, and commended its wide range of engine options.

"Practicality, value for money and reliability are essential ingredients for today's small-car buyer, and with those factors in mind, you simply can't do better than the Skoda Fabia. Interior space is remarkable, with a 330-litre



Best First Car for the second year running, Citigo



Skoda Fabia was named Best Small Car

boot and plenty of head and legroom for four or five passengers" commented Stuart Milne.

In what was Škoda's most successful CarBuyer Awards to date, the Yeti was also honoured – driving off with the 'Best Car for Under £150 a Month' title.

Explaining the decision, said: "The Škoda Yeti is one of our favourite small SUVs thanks

to its superb build quality, efficient engines and engaging driving experience.

Remarkable

"So it's all the more remarkable that you can park a Yeti outside your house for less than £150 a month on a Personal Contract Purchase (PCP)."



Taking Best Car for Under £150 a Month was the Yeti

Completing remarkable haul of titles, the Škoda's Superb Estate was named Best Estate Car. The judges praised the Superb's exceptional 660 litre boot and welcomed the attention to detail that marks the estate model out from its sector competitors.

Stuart Milne added: "The best estate cars offer more than just plenty of space for your

luggage. They provide well thought-out solutions to all kinds of everyday problems. No car does this better than the Superb Estate.

"Umbrellas in the doors and grippy cup-holders that allow you to unscrew bottles one-handed all contribute to making this such a brilliant car."

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www.portwayfencing.co.uk

gardening services

For all your Patio's, Turfing, Decking, treework and Root grinding...

Prestwood FENCING & LANDSCAPING

Prestwood Cave Nurseries, Wolverhampton Rd, Prestwood DV7 5AN
Call us on 01384 273586 or 07847 679403 or visit www.prestwoodfencing.co.uk for more details

gas fitting

GAS SERVICES
Boilers
Cookers
Fires
Gas Checks
Landlord Certificates
Gas Leaks Traced
Fitted, Serviced and Repaired Same Day Service
Free Quotes
DISCOUNTS FOR OAPs
Call: 01902 366855/ 07761 973975

READERS ARE ADVISED To check that anyone carrying out any Gas work is Gas Safe Registered. It is an offence under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998 to put gas work in the UK without being on the Gas Safe Register.

A BOILER BREAKDOWN, COOKER, FIRE, FITTED-SERVICED-REPAIRED
Landlord certs. All areas covered. J&E Heating. Call John:
01902 562664 / 07969 687832

guttering

PROPERTY SOLUTIONS
A1 GUTTERING
cleaned, repaired, replaced, fascia/soffits, UPVC washdowns, all roofing/repainting work. Free quotes, 8am-8pm
01902 722447

handyman services

YOUR LOCAL HANDYMAN

FREE QUOTES
All work guaranteed. Most trades covered. References available on request. No job too big or too small.
CALL MIKE: 07947 621047
0121 6010479

Classified Ads

BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL

CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

I average around 1 to 2 phone calls a day from customers as a direct result of my Classified Advertising. I am very happy with my response levels.

Mr Causor.

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL
01902 319 191

Brought to you by Express & Star

house clearances

A ABSOLUTE BEST cash price paid for house clearances and bereavements. Also removals undertaken. 07852 172641 / 07710 360327.

YMCA REQUIRE FURNITURE Free Collection. Telephone 01384 231714 for details.

oven cleaning

AAA OVEN CLEANING, Ovens, Hobs, Aga / Range / Micro / Extractors. 01902 669418 / 07910 921736

painters / decorators

CALL M & B DECORATORS
City & Guilds
No job too small
Free Quote
01902 494555

A PROFESSIONAL DECORATING service by RC Decorating. Free competitive quotes: 07773 025880.

LOVE 2 WALLPAPER
Reliable & Friendly, Professional Female Painters & Decorators
Attention to detail, competitive prices. For the Perfect Finish with minimum hassle. Plastering & Coving Work Undertaken
01384 287577 or 07812 484194
www.love-2-wallpaper.co.uk

C I PAINTING & DECORATING
Over 30 yrs experience. City & Guilds approved. Free Quotes. 07890 879 892 01902 650716.

INTERIOR PAINTER AND DECORATOR Friendly and reliable, clean and tidy. Call Deb 01384 829473 / 07502 396385

plans prepared

ADAM DESIGN, Building Plans. Drawn and submitted to council. Tel: 01902 602000 / 07841 654037. Email: adamdesign@sky.com

plumbing & heating

CENTRA HEAT
Boiler Servicing inc Free Landlords Certificate. Power Flushing, Boiler/ System Repairs
£200 OFF/Trade in old boiler
Installed in January. T&C apply
01902 845211

Keiron Jones Plumbing & Heating
Full heating systems £2200
Boiler Changes £1100
Longer warranty available upon request, fires and surrounds also available.
For Free Quotes Call:
01902 403823 07811 855231

Classified Ads

BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL

CENTRA HEAT

CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

We are really happy with our Classified advertising package and the business it brings us.

Martin -
Centra Heat

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL
01902 319 191

Brought to you by Express & Star

SJH PLUMBING AND HEATING

Gas safe reg, all plumbing & central heating undertaken. Call for free quote. 07855 020552

plastering

DOMESTIC PLASTERING

rendering & small building work undertaken, 40 years experience. For a free quote
Call Roy
07887 495726
07583 643932

M & S PLASTERING & BUILDING SERVICES, Home/Garden Improvements, Kitchens or Sars: 07741 770897

STEVES PLASTERING SERVICE
Clean and Reliable. All Work Undertaken. All Areas. Call 0121 567 5919 / 07977 262943.

plumbers

G M PLUMBING SERVICES Complete Bathrooms, Kitchens, Taps Showers, Blockages 07976 012468

removals

A & M CHEAP REMOVALS
Local Careful Firm
Full or Part loads
Call Don:
07749 941319

A MAN WITH A VAN Single items, flat/house removals/clearances, local/nationwide. Call Steve 0121 422 2999 or 07815 043724

CALL DEAN NOW: For all your Removal needs: 07429 45209 / 01902 830670 / 01384 940260.

CALL PETE - MAN WITH A VAN. Removals, clearances, large/small. 01902 741546, 07899 635852.

KT HOUSE REMOVALS
12 years experience. SINGLE ITEMS TO FULL LOADS. LOCAL OR DISTANCE. FULLY INSURED. Free Quotes - Call Ric on:
07771 727119

KINGS OF THE ROAD REMOVAL
Single items/Full loads from £20. OAP discount. Andy 07512 395370, Keith 07545 618231.

plumbing & heating

CENTRA HEAT
Boiler Servicing inc Free Landlords Certificate. Power Flushing, Boiler/ System Repairs
£200 OFF/Trade in old boiler
Installed in January. T&C apply
01902 845211

Keiron Jones Plumbing & Heating
Full heating systems £2200
Boiler Changes £1100
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Centra Heat

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01902 319 191

Brought to you by Express & Star

SJH PLUMBING AND HEATING

Gas safe reg, all plumbing & central heating undertaken. Call for free quote. 07855 020552

ClassifiedAds
BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL

GRINSELLS SKIP HIRE

CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

Thanks to our Classified advertising in the Express & Star we are really busy! It definitely works for us!

Grinsells Skip Hire.

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL 01902 319 191

Brought to you by **Express & Star**

BIG JOHN MOVES RUBBISH!
No Skips, we load, fast friendly service. 25 Lister Rd, Dudley DY2 8JR, Est 35 years, 01384 232359.

STONES SKIP HIRE
0121 557 1480 / 07886 21875
www.stoneskiphire.co.uk

tree services

S T ROOFING All roofing work carried out. Call: 01902 884705 / 07841 842824

upholstery

www.bilstonupholstery.co.uk
Your suite / chair re-upholstered or repaired. Free Est: 01902 404698.

4 Pets & Animals

equestrian corner

ALL READERS are advised to check if Horses have the required Passport information.

guns & dogs

NOTICE TO ADVERTISERS
Advertisers must ensure that they meet all necessary legal requirements for owning and using guns.

pets corner

GREYHOUNDS MAKE WONDERFUL PETS
All neutered, inoculated and microchipped.
Call 01922 412212 or www.rgtwolverhampton.co.uk
f RGT Wolverhampton
t @RGTWolves

NOTICE TO READERS
Please be aware that when purchasing a puppy there are some simple guidelines you can follow to ensure that you are not purchasing from a Puppy Farmer:
1. Try to ensure you visit the puppy whilst it is still with it's Mother.
2. Do not arrange to collect a puppy from any other location than that of the breeder.
3. Ensure that you are given any KC documentation, if pedigree. Whilst Midland News Association publications take great care to avoid publication of advertisements from Puppy Farmers we cannot accept any liability should readers purchase from this kind of establishment.

CAVAPOO BITCH 6 months, preferably suit mature couple. 07867 530504. (Bridgnorth)

CHIHUAHUA PUPPIES 3 boys, parents can be seen, very small, £450 each. 07847 577924.

PATTERDALE X jack russell puppies, 8 weeks old, 4 dogs, £150 each. 01902 723203.

5 Business & Farming

business opportunities

READERS are recommended to take appropriate professional advice before entering any obligations.

business directory

accountants

ACCOUNTANCY SERVICES for Small Business. Competitive Rates. Call 01902 882600

commercial premises

UNITS AND OFFICE SPACE to let in Oldbury, West Bromwich and Walsall. Easy Terms. Ashmore Properties 0121 520 5318.

6 Property

accommodation to let

A1 BED STUDIO BILSTON. A1 bed studio chapel ash 2 bed Fallings Park. DSS ok 01902 686605

NOTICE TO READERS
Readers are advised to seek independent legal advice before entering into any financial commitments.

NOTICE TO READERS It is an offence under the Accommodation Agencies Act 1953, for an Agency to charge a fee simply for the registration of your requirements and/or supplying particulars of premises to let.

BEDSITS, TETTENHALL AREA. Fully furnished. CH. No DSS 07976 263435 / 01902 700 028.

SMART ROOMS in shared house. Netherton, from £85 pwk Single, £95 pwk DBL inc bills. No DSS. 07970 717139 or 07940 116130.

overseas property

NOTICE TO READERS
Readers are advised to seek independent legal advice before entering into any financial commitments.

properties wanted

Home Cash Buyer
Sell today, sign today, complete when u wish
£££ RENT BACK OPTIONS £££
Houses / Land Required
Ring Paul 24/7 Local **07870 341 089**
Sandwell area: Call 0121 696 4154
Walsall & Cannock area: Call 01922 432049
Wolverhampton: Call 01902 489901
www.homecashbuyer.co.uk

ClassifiedAds BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL

CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

We have been advertising in the Express & Star and Chronicles for over 20 years and consider it a key part of our business with the regular flow of calls, which our advertising generates.

Black Country Homes

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL 01902 319 191

Brought to you by **Express & Star**

Need to sell your home fast?
We can help you make a fresh start
With solutions to suit... you can clear your debts and make a fresh start

Purchase Agreed Within 7 DAYS

ALL CIRCUMSTANCES CONSIDERED.
COMPLETE ON DATE TO SUIT
FREE VALUATION AND LEGALS
FREE FRIENDLY ADVICE
LOCAL COMPANY

MARION | PROPERTY SOLUTIONS
WHY NOT CALL US TODAY for an informal, friendly and confidential chat?
01384 930 979 OUR LINES ARE OPEN 24/7

*Terms and Conditions apply

ClassifiedAds BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL

CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

"I am really pleased with the response I get from my Classified Advertising!"
Paul Westwood - Home Cash Buyer

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL 01902 319 191

Brought to you by **Express & Star**

A LOCAL BUYER pays full market value and more for your property. Call Rick 07729 297901

7 Jobs

cleaners

full time - general

KINGSWINFORM AREA
We require a driver with a clean driving licence and a trailer towing licence for delivery / collections nationally. When not driving to be able to work in a warehouse environment, picking, packing and goods inwards etc. Candidate must be flexible, polite and have a positive and enthusiastic attitude towards work and must have experience in towing. All interested applicants forward there CV to info@westfield-sportscars.co.uk

EXPERIENCED OFFICE CLEANER required for immediate start - Kingswinford area. Monday to Friday (5 mornings), 2 hours each morning 7:30am-9:30am. Rate of pay: £7.50 p.h. Contact Dawn Marsh on 01384 400900 between 9:15-1:15pm Mon-Thurs.

drivers

DELIVERY DRIVER/WAREHOUSE PERSON To drive 7.5 tonne vehicle, must have CPC & Digicard for a Dudley based potato merchant. Write to Mrs D Bradley 61 Tower Street, Dudley DY1 1NH.

engineering

TOOL MAKER required Dudley area with good knowledge in all aspects of machining, CNC programming and setting. With ability to work on own incentive. Good working environment, hours and rate of pay. Send CV to toolmakercv@gmail.com

management / supervisory

FULL TIME MANAGERIAL POSITION in our Dudley Store. Experience essential, good rates of pay plus bonus options. Please contact- Mike Ottley on 0796 731353 or 01902 788663. A CV is required.

8 Motoring

cars over £1500

MANY EXTRAS

BMW 523i
1997, 84,000 Miles, silver, abs, electric windows, electric mirrors, air con, FSH, long MoT, auto, central locking, sunroof, Leather Interior.
£1,750 ono.
07425136504



BMW Z4 ROADSTER
Low mileage (69,200). 3.0 petrol, 2004, metallic grey, MoT, fsh, lady owner last 8 years plus, excellent condition, black leather interior, powered seats, alarm, central locking, radio/CD.
£5,265 ono.
Telephone 01384 832293 or 07811 11583.



FIAT PUNTO 1.4
2007, 39,000 miles. Orange. 1.4 Sport. MoT November 17. Lovely Condition.
£1,650.
07375 609663.



HYUNDAI COUPE 2.0
2005, 79,107 miles, 2 litre SE, black, MoT, 2 previous owners, part service history, good condition, well equipped.
£1,695 ono.
07881 360495.



LANDROVER FREELANDER 2
2.2 Td4 GS 5door, 2009, low mileage 66,042 Miles, grey, diesel, alloys, MOT May 2017 Wolverhampton
£6,200
07538045376

AUTOMATIC

SUZUKI ALTO 1.0

AUTOMATIC

09 reg, 23,000 miles, 1 previous lady owner, beautiful inside and out, any trial.
£2,650 ono.
07800 637961
(Wolverhampton)

7 SEATER

VAUXHALL ZAFIRA SRI TURBO DIESEL

7 seater. Alloy wheels. MoT April 17. Black.
£2,100 ono.
07940 399710.

cars under £1500

EXCELLENT CONDITION

CHEVORLET KALOS 1.2
2007, 34,000 miles, excellent condition, black, MoT June 2017
£1,250.
01902 893673.



CITROEN SAXODESIRE 1.1
2003, 110,940 Miles, Silver, abs, electric windows, air bag, CD player, some service history, must clearly differentiate between Private and Trade.
£450
07858232769

CITROEN XSARA
77,800 miles, grey, electric windows, long MoT, stereo.
£375.
07963 753038.

FIAT PUNTO 1.2 ACTIVE SPORT
2003 reg, 52,00 miles. MoT July 2017, EW, PAS, CL, very reliable, good condition. Some service history.
£375
07956 615584.

FORD KA 1.3
2004, very low 56,000 miles, silver, MoT end of July 2017, CD player, some service history, good runner, ideal first car.
£650 ono.
07840 631953.

ADVERTISERS ARE REMINDED
that the Business Advertisements (Disclosure) Order of 1977 requires that advertisements must clearly differentiate between Private and Trade.



FORD KA
58 plate, 2009
New MoT, EW, PAS, CL, two owners,
£895.
07449 431723.

BARGAIN

FORD MONDEO DIESEL
2005 reg, 155,400 miles, air con, MoT June 2017, alloys, CD, interior great, no rust or dents,
£750 ono.
07762 255881.

MUST BE SEEN

MERCEDES E CLASS
Diesel, 3.0, top of range Estate 121,000 documented miles. Smart, 39mpg, in daily use. Any trial.
Luxury travel or high speed tourer, or at this price big work estate.
You can choose
£1,499.
01527 878470. 07503 190599.

MUST BE SEEN

MERCEDES E200

ESTATE
2000, X Reg., petrol, 7 seater, MoT'd, alloys, stereo, very clean, 112,000 miles.
£795.
07950 398750.

BARGAIN

PEUGEOT 206 COUPE

02 plate, Mot till April 2017, blue, 39,401 miles, good condition / runner.
£550 ono.
07475 569077.

Express & Star

FIXED PRICE RECRUITMENT PACKAGE

FILL YOUR NEXT VACANCY WITH OUR BRONZE FIXED PRICE RECRUITMENT PACKAGE

Bronze package includes:

- 5cm x 2 column advert in Express & Star (Thursday)
- 5cm x 2 column advert in Chronicle of your choice
- Two week listing on jobs.expressandstar.com
- 5 line advert to appear in Express & Star Classified jobs for 5 nights
- We will run the lineage and online advert on a daily basis until you fill the vacancy

Package Price £399*

JANUARY SPECIAL OFFER
Book a January recruitment package and get a second package at **half price** within 6 months

*All prices are subject to VAT



driving tuition

Homer's
10 Hours £125! Four Hours £40!
2 Hours £20! All Areas Covered
ADVICE REQUIRED. Gift vouchers available for £10
07432 458100 / 01562 870050
01384 234564 / 0121 5640090
01902 580065 www.homersdrivingschool.co.uk

Drive All Seasons
Lessons Starting FROM
10 Lessons £39
Manual & Automatic
Free Unlimited Theory
07517 845477
www.driveallseasons.co.uk

AMAZING OFFER 5 lessons £40,
10 lessons £80. £20 an hour there
after. Call now 07958 051263.

scrap vehicles

OUR ADVERTISERS are reminded that
it is an offence under the Scrap
Metal Dealers Act 2013 to buy
scrap cars/metal for cash.

1.4, Y reg, 2001, MoT July,
70,000 miles, PAS, electric
windows and mirrors, alloy
wheels, good heater, lots of
service history, reliable,
economical.

£375 ono.

07393 056188.

BARGAIN

VAUXHALL CORSA 1.1 SXI

03, full MoT, 80k miles, runs
and looks great.

£475 no offers.

01384 440258.

**1ST TO SEE
WILL BUY**

**VAUXHALL CORSA 1.4
BREEZE**

S Reg., silver, 5dr hatchback,
EW, CL, radio cassette, MoT to
November 2017, nice tidy car,
64k miles.

Bargain £595 ono.

01562 752815.



VAUXHALL MERIVA

2007, 50,676 Miles, blue, elec-
tric windows, air bag, air con,
MoT, central locking, CD

£1,500 ono

07718229061

**1ST TO SEE
WILL BUY**

VW POLO 1400

02 Reg., 12 months MoT, very
clean inside and out, good
runner, stereo radio/CD, alloys.

£995. o.n.o.

01902 862610.

classic cars

CLASSIC CAR

MGB CONVERTIBLE

1975, tax exempt with hard top,
engine, gear box, for restoration
/ spares.

Bargain £800 ono

01902 219156 or

07896 482219.

WANTED, CLASSIC Cars. Private
cash buyer. instant cash settle-
ment. Any age. Any condition.
01630 652993 or 07773 462797.

**commercial
vehicles**

servicing

VAUXHALL COMBO VAN

2001, 9 months MoT, 100,000
miles, recent service.

£450 ono.

07445 708064.

9 Local Information

public & legal notices

JENNIFER NANCY BEASLEY (Deceased)
Pursuant to the Trustee Act 1925
any persons having a claim against
or an interest in the Estate of the
aforementioned deceased, late of
369 Sandfields Road Dudley West
Midlands DY3 3DJ, who died on
14/05/2016, are required to send
particulars thereof in writing to the
undersigned Solicitors on or before
24/02/2017, after which date the
Estate will be distributed having
regard only to claims and interests of
which they have had notice.

TALBOT'S LAW
63 Market Street
Stourbridge DY8 1AQ T488282

10 Personals

personal

ADULT CINEMA
We're still here,
we were the first,
the best and we'll be
here after all the rest!

The Foxy Lady
01902 490988
GENTLEMEN'S DANCE
BAR OPENING SOON
01902 405522

10 Personals

general

**GOOD PAY
FOR MODELS**
For Amateur photographic
work.
07759 804772.

I AM LOOKING FOR MY SON
Mr A. Lewis.
Last seen Wolverhampton.
Please get in touch with
Box Number P20647,
Express and Star,
Queen Street,
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

10 Personals

MR MAGIC
You are the most wonderful
person in the world and I love
you more than ever.

All my love, now and always.

Mrs Magic.
X X X X X

**BOOK YOUR
ADVERTISEMENTS
OR FAMILY
ANNOUNCEMENTS
ONLINE AT**
bookanad.
expressandstar.co.uk

**and become one
of hundreds of
customers
who regularly
receive
exclusive
special offers
& discounts.**

Classified Ads

driving tuition

Homer's
10 Hours £125! Four Hours £40!
2 Hours £20! All Areas Covered
ADVICE REQUIRED. Gift vouchers available for £10
07432 458100 / 01562 870050
01384 234564 / 0121 5640090
01902 580065 www.homersdrivingschool.co.uk

Drive All Seasons
Lessons Starting FROM
10 Lessons £39
Manual & Automatic
Free Unlimited Theory
07517 845477
www.driveallseasons.co.uk

AMAZING OFFER 5 lessons £40,
10 lessons £80. £20 an hour there
after. Call now 07958 051263.

scrap vehicles

OUR ADVERTISERS are reminded that
it is an offence under the Scrap
Metal Dealers Act 2013 to buy
scrap cars/metal for cash.

vehicles wanted

CROWN MOTORS guarantee best
price for your unwanted cars/vans.
07903 549849, buyer will call.

SPORTS CAR WANTED
I am retired and looking for a
project.
Please help me find an old
Sports Car.
Anything in any condition
considered, good or poor.
Not looking for a cheap buy.
Prefer before 1990.
01746 718499, 07710 856867.

spares & accessories

**clutches / brakes
/ gearboxes**

**A CLUTCH
CHANGE MOBILE**
For Example:
Citroen C1, C2, C3
Hyundai 110, Toyota Yaris
Clio5 & Micras
Ring for quotes on others!
30 yrs experience
ALL AREAS COVERED
Call Bob
01384 251328
07972 169554
anytime

HAVING CAR PROBLEMS Leave
your car in good hands, come to us!
Call BCR Service 01384 259016

spares/parts

BATTERIES FROM £34.95
Corsa, Fiesta, Focus, Saxo,
3 Year Guarantee, Wolve Hires
01902 746723, WV6 OLE

Express & Star DATING

Here's how to use your dating service ...

To Place your advert call:
0844 381 5936
Simply text: REG followed by your first name, date
of birth and your advert choice (15 characters max)
and send to 80098 FREE Standard Network rates apply

To Place your ad by text:
http://dating.expressandstar.com

YOU can now Date ONLINE or via your mobile just visit:
http://dating.expressandstar.com

THE biggest UK on-line database of 17 million UK REAL users waiting to meet you... visit...
http://dating.expressandstar.com

Single Women

REMEMBER: Calls cost £1.55 per
minute plus your phone company's
access charge. Texts cost £1.50 per
message received.

JULIE attractive 35yr old female
with a great body, looking for no
strings attached evening meet.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
425037

JOSIE, sexy black lady, 52yrs seeks
adult times with concerning get,
any, discreet clean, womanly figure.
Text only Mailbox: 4028592

MARY, passionate honest slim blue-
eyed blonde, 39yrs, likes nights
in/out, looking for affectionate male,
any age to spend adult fun times.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 425009

ANNABELLE, sophisticated 29yrs
looking to meet older gent for adult
fun, discreet, sincere, genuine
advertiser. Text only Mailbox:
4157105

JACKIE, 56yrs, attractive lady who
is lots of fun seeks like-minded gent
for nights in, days out and much
more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424491

DONNA, 42, bright bubbly blue
eyed blonde looking for someone to
enjoy life and love to the full with
Call me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424873

MARY, professional mature lady,
loves life, very sociable and fun,
seeks gent for good conversation
and happy times. All calls and texts
answered. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424775

SUE, attractive genuine lady, own
home, loves to spend a man, give me
a call or text. AKA. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424673

SUZANNA, 45, lonely beautiful
classy French lady looking for happy
discreet reliable very sexy man for
lots of TLC and good times. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424847

SARAH, young looking curvy 41yr
old female, bored with everyday rou-
tines, WLTm up for some fun dis-
creet and extremely broadminded
younger male. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424827

DEBBIE, 50, petite blonde looking
for some fun and adventure with
slim man loving mature male.
Looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424799

CALL or text me, I'm Claire, single,
41yrs loves life to the full, hoping
you will contact me if you want a
genuine fun time. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424779

SARAH, mature feminine lady, kind
caring but still has a sensual side,
hoping to meet like minded, confi-
dent, fun, sexy smoking gent with GSCH,
looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424777

PROFESSIONAL lady, mid 60s,
interests include gardening, theatre,
walking, days out and travelling, ani-
mal lover, looking for a professional
gentleman, kind and caring, intellec-
tual and outgoing, with gosh, for
friendship possibly more, in the
Stafford area. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424569

Hi I'm Ellie, 39, pretty, funny, great
figure, OHAC/child, have everything
apart from a man, WLTm someone I
wanna be with, not have to be. Call
me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424635

ATTRACTIVE professional lady, 57,
widow, likes dining out, country
pubs, good conversation and laugh-
ter, seeks genuine professional
gent with a gosh with similar inter-
ests, to enjoy life with. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424157

ANDREA, 43, slim with long dark
hair, blue eyes, loves to dance
seeks romantic man to share inti-
mate moments in or out. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424747

DIVORCED female, attractive, sen-
sual by nature, OHAC, bored with
cinema, looking to make life a
little more exciting with likeminded
man. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424591

JANE, 40's, blonde blue-eyed petite
build, WLTm understanding discreet
tal, caring man for daytime meets.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424769

Single Women

PATRICIA, 50s, solvent female, tac-
tile, fun, likes to travel, seeks tall,
easygoing mature male to enjoy all
the good things in life with. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424553

BARBARA, 36, slim blonde, likes
music, sport, the outdoors, quiet
nights in etc, WLTm kind honest
gent to share interests and get to
know me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424549

HELEN, mid 50's naughty lady
seeks some fun times with gent any
age. AKA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424493

ANGELA, 48yrs, seeks male com-
panion for nights out, dining, maybe
more. AKA or text me. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424495

JULIE, 53yrs, tall, slim, dark haired
lady, sociable and fun loving, new to
the area so WLTm men friends for
fun, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424497

SEXY brunette 39, petite, brown
eyes, seeks energetic discreet guy
for no strings fun and friendship.
Ageist/sex unimportant. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424451

HEATHER, 48, well travelled sol-
vent brunette looking to share a
large glass of wine and whatever fol-
lows with affectionate man friend.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424429

TERRI, attractive young looking
29yrs, long legged sporty seeking
nice man to fall in love with, up to
45yrs. If that's you please call, you
have nothing to lose. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424377

IAN, 518, medium build, OHAC, late
50s, likes most things, holidays,
gardening, motorbikes, WLTm similar
age, lady, 150-60, with nice
personality. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 421345

MIKE, 49, slim, young looks, seeks
female, 35-50 for friendship and
going out. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 356651

DAVE, 54, 5ft10, medium build,
easy going, happy, looking for an
attractive, loving and caring female,
45-65, for friendship and relation-
ship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
423073

YOUNG 70 widower, fit, lonely, 5ft
11ins, 11st, likes drives, walks, DIY,
meats out, gardening, smoker, look-
ing for lady to spend life with. Tel
No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424687

BIG is beautiful is larger is lovelier,
Steve 58, seeking broadminded,
adventurous BBW for fun times. Tel
No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
412031

TOM, 32, slim, attractive, own
home, likes to eat out and in, WLTm
honest, kind gent for tender, loving
care and fun times. No time-wasters
please. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box
No: 424927

MALE, 64, single, n/s, likes music,
films, driving, nights in, dining out,
trips, WLTm lady, 50-70, looks unim-
portant, for friendship and relation-
ship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424927

CARING male, 55, N/S, medium
build, likes meals out, music, cine-
ma, sports, driving, seeks female
40-60 for friendship. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 239148

HONEST male, 60s, N/S, GSCH,
car owner, seeks female, 55-70 for
friendship, maybe more. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 416817

MALE, 63, caring, easygoing, N/S
seeks female 50-70 for friendship
and romance. Looks unimportant.
Likes occasional dining, eating in/out.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418893

47 year old guy, 5ft7, dark hair, blue
eyes, likes DVDs, nights in and out,
seeks female, 42-49, in Leamington
Spa/Rugby area, for friendship and
long term relationship. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424325

CHRISTIAN male 51, seeking
Christian female, 35-45 for friend-
ship, looking to meet attractive
500 3955 Box No: 423747

MATURE male, 50, medium-build,
varied interests, seeks true Christian
female, 35-45, who enjoys evenings
in and dining out, for friendship or
possibly more. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 419283

MALE, 59, 5ft2, dark hair, looking
for a lady, 50-60, to share the good
things in life. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424759

ANY mature women over 60 seek-
ing adult fun - this attractive male 58
will cater for your needs, any size or
status. Text only. Mailbox:
5410860

WIDOWER, 60s, GSCH, n/s, likes
places of interest, country walks,
cats and dogs, music, theatre and
cinema, still looking for a lady,
around 55-65, for companionship.
ACA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box
No: 424709

ATTRACTIVE, tall, dark, profession-
al male, 50, GSCH, easygoing,
enjoys sport, socialising, good com-
pany, looking to meet attractive
female for fun, adventure and take
things from there. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424563

59YR old male, likes country walks,
pub lunches, seeks lady for friend-
ship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424685

MALE 50 seeks mature, home lov-
ing lady, 60 plus who enjoys cosy
nights in. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424683

MARTIN trustworthy, warm hearted,
loving, reliable male, 45, 6ft, medi-
um build, young at heart, GSCH,
seeks female, 50-60 for friendship,
maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424681

MARK 48, slim, fit, GSCH, looking
for loyal partner for LTR. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424679

CARING 55yr old male, widower, 6ft
3ins, WLTm lady, 40-55 for fun and
laughter, maybe happy ever after.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424677

MALE 57, attractive, seeks mature
woman any age for close fun, mar-
ried or single. Text only Mailbox:
5410860

BLACK male, ex-marine, 6ft11,
would like to meet a lady, 30 or over,
if you would like a night in or out,
please contact me. Give me a shout.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424507

ADVENTUROUS 36-year-old male,
slim, dark hair, likes music, cycling
and photography, seeks female for
friendship, maybe more. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 417235

GENT 48, youthful outlook, likes
countryside, keep fit, karaoke, seeks
soul mate for fun times. N
Shropshire. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 408411

IAN, GSCH, 60, looking for some-
body to go out with and have a good
time, a good laugh, maybe things
will move on, I'm young at heart so
looking for younger female if possi-
ble, NSA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424357

RETIRED male seeking compani-
onship maybe more. No time wasters.
Text only Mailbox: 5542315

ITALIAN male, 46, from Oldbury,
seeking female, 30-50, for friend-
ship, possible relationship. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424371

MALE, 59, 5ft2, looking for genuine
lady, 50-55, to share the good things
in life. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box
No: 424353

NICE old-fashioned gent, seeks
kind, caring romantic lady for LTR.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
416905

TIM, young at heart, intelligent, fun
loving, spontaneous, GSCH, WLTm
a lady with a GSCH, for friendship
and possibly more. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424395

ATTRACTIVE, Tall and intelligent
Black male 50, lover of animals and
nature seeks solvent lady of quality
50+ for romance. Text only
Mailbox: 5561456

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message received.

JULIE attractive 35yr old female
with a great body, looking for no
strings attached evening meet.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
425037

JOSIE, sexy black lady, 52yrs seeks
adult times with concerning get,
any, discreet clean, womanly figure.
Text only Mailbox: 4028592

MARY, passionate honest slim blue-
eyed blonde, 39yrs, likes nights
in/out, looking for affectionate male,
any age to spend adult fun times.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 425009

ANNABELLE, sophisticated 29yrs
looking to meet older gent for adult
fun, discreet, sincere, genuine
advertiser. Text only Mailbox:
4157105

JACKIE, 56yrs, attractive lady who
is lots of fun seeks like-minded gent
for nights in, days out and much
more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424491

DONNA, 42, bright bubbly blue
eyed blonde looking for someone to
enjoy life and love to the full with
Call me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424873

MARY, professional mature lady,
loves life, very sociable and fun,
seeks gent for good conversation
and happy times. All calls and texts
answered. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424775

SUE, attractive genuine lady, own
home, loves to spend a man, give me
a call or text. AKA. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424673

SUZANNA, 45, lonely beautiful
classy French lady looking for happy
discreet reliable very sexy man for
lots of TLC and good times. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424847

SARAH, young looking curvy 41yr
old female, bored with everyday rou-
tines, WLTm up for some fun dis-
creet and extremely broadminded
younger male. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424827

DEBBIE, 50, petite blonde looking
for some fun and adventure with
slim man loving mature male.
Looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424799

CALL or text me, I'm Claire, single,
41yrs loves life to the full, hoping
you will contact me if you want a
genuine fun time. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424779

SARAH, mature feminine lady, kind
caring but still has a sensual side,
hoping to meet like minded, confi-
dent, fun, sexy smoking gent with GSCH,
looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424777

PROFESSIONAL lady, mid 60s,
interests include gardening, theatre,
walking, days out and travelling, ani-
mal lover, looking for a professional
gentleman, kind and caring, intellec-
tual and outgoing, with gosh, for
friendship possibly more, in the
Stafford area. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424569

Hi I'm Ellie, 39, pretty, funny, great
figure, OHAC/child, have everything
apart from a man, WLTm someone I
wanna be with, not have to be. Call
me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424635

ATTRACTIVE professional lady, 57,
widow, likes dining out, country
pubs, good conversation and laugh-
ter, seeks genuine professional
gent with a gosh with similar inter-
ests, to enjoy life with. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424157

ANDREA, 43, slim with long dark
hair, blue eyes, loves to dance
seeks romantic man to share inti-
mate moments in or out. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424747

DIVORCED female, attractive, sen-
sual by nature, OHAC, bored with
cinema, looking to make life a
little more exciting with likeminded
man. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424591

JANE, 40's, blonde blue-eyed petite
build, WLTm understanding discreet
tal, caring man for daytime meets.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
424769

Single Women

PATRICIA, 50s, solvent female, tac-
tile, fun, likes to travel, seeks tall,
easygoing mature male to enjoy all
the good things in life with. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424553

BARBARA, 36, slim blonde, likes
music, sport, the outdoors, quiet
nights in etc, WLTm kind honest
gent to share interests and get to
know me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424549

HELEN, mid 50's naughty lady
seeks some fun times with gent any
age. AKA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 424493

ANGELA, 48yrs, seeks male com-
panion for nights out, dining, maybe
more. AKA or text me. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424495

JULIE, 53yrs, tall, slim, dark haired
lady, sociable and fun loving, new to
the area so WLTm men friends for
fun, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500
3955 Box No: 424497

SEXY brunette 39, petite, brown
eyes, seeks energetic discreet guy
for no strings fun and friendship.
Ageist/sex unimportant. Tel No:
0906 500 3955 Box No: 424451

HEATHER, 48, well travelled sol-
vent brunette looking to share a
large glass of wine and whatever fol-
lows with affectionate man friend.
Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
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TERRI, attractive young looking
29yrs, long legged sporty seeking
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45yrs. If that's you please call, you
have nothing to lose. Tel No: 0906
500 3955 Box No: 424377

Single Men

IAN, 518, medium build, OHAC, late
50s, likes most things, holidays,
gardening, motorbikes, WLTm similar
age, lady, 150-60, with nice
personality. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 421345

MIKE, 49, slim, young looks, seeks
female, 35-50 for friendship and
going out. Tel No: 0906 500 3955
Box No: 356651

DAVE, 54, 5ft10, medium build,
easy going, happy, looking for an
attractive, loving and caring female,
45-65, for friendship and relation-
ship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No:
423073

YOUNG 70 widower, fit, lonely, 5ft
11ins, 11st, likes drives, walks, DIY,
meats out, gardening, smoker, look-
ing for lady to spend life with. Tel
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Cannock's Graham Machin, Clubman of the Year, receives his award from league president John Priest



Umpire of the Year Trevor Cotton collects his award from John Priest at the Banks's Stadium



Junior Performance winner Chris Becker with John Priest

Milford haul bowls over Staffs Clubs cricket rivals

MILFORD HALL walked off with an impressive haul of silverware at the Staffs Clubs' awards night.

The league brought the curtain down on another successful summer at Walsall Football Club's Banks's Stadium with former England, Leicestershire and Kent wicketkeeper Paul Nixon the guest of honour, entertaining the 100-plus audience with tales from his 23-year playing career.

League secretary Kevin Herbert said: "Paul was very good. He spoke for about 40 minutes about his playing days and then did a lengthy question and answer session with the audience."

"He signed a load of books throughout the evening and never refused a photograph or an autograph. He was very amenable."

"It was a very good and enjoyable evening and a great way to end a successful season."

Milford had most to celebrate after a fine summer that saw them clinch promotion to the Birmingham League after winning the Premier Division title.

Crowned

They also doubled up by lifting the first team Knockout Cup while the second team were crowned Premier A champions. For good measure talented youngster Chris Becker picked up the Junior Performance of the Year award.

Among the other accolades that were dished out, Cannock stalwart Graham Machin was a worthy winner of the Clubman of the Year award while Trevor Cotton was Umpire of the Year.

The night capped an impressive season for the league that saw the introduction of a new playing format in the top three divisions with 11 games played under the old system that included the possibility of

SPORTING FEATURE

By Nick Elwell

"It was a very good and enjoyable evening and a great way to end a successful season."

a draw and 11 played on a straight win or lose basis with restrictions on the number of overs a player could bowl.

"The switch in playing format was well received by the clubs," said Herbert. "It was obviously new to the captains and teams but the feedback we have received has been very good."

"You obviously need a minimum of five bowlers in the win or lose format. And I think you end up with the strongest team coming out on top as opposed to the team with the strongest overseas player."

"The plan was for the format to run for two years and it will be reviewed over the winter."

"We are slightly concerned at the number of conceded games, especially in the lower divisions, but all in all it was a successful season."

"I think Milford were worthy winners in the end and as a league we wish them all the best for next season in the Birmingham League," added Herbert.

Springvale and Rugeley will be playing top flight cricket next season after gaining promotion from Division One with just one side, Bloxwich, relegated due to the fact no Staffordshire sides came down from Division Three of the Birmingham League. Elford are

joining the league next season while Springvale are entering a third team and Wightwick will a fourth.

Staffs Clubs roll of honour:

Premier Division: Winners Milford Hall; runners-up Beacon.

Premier A: Winners Milford Hall; runners-up Aldridge.

Division 1: Winners Springvale; runners-up Rugeley.

Division 2: Winners HGBU; runners-up Old Wulfs.

Division 3: Winners Wolverhampton; runners-up Burntwood St Matthews.

Division 4: Winners Wombourne; runners-up Rushall.

Division 5: Winners Wightwick & Finchfield; runners-up Beacon.

Batting - Premier Division: Brian Barnard (Cannock) 1044 runs. Premier A: Shafqat Hussain (Aldridge) 671. Division 1: Stuart Jones (Coseley) 849. Division 2: Mohammed Ajmal (HGBU) 734. Division 3: Hassan Touqeer (Wolv) 758. Division 4: Tim Davis (Milord Hall) 588. Division 5: Michael Jones (W+F) 519.

Bowling - Premier Division: Ejaz Nawaz (Milford Hall) 51 wickets. Premier A: Matthew Richards (Penn) 32. Division 1: Mohammed Sultan (Rugeley) 57. Division 2: Ben Hallam (OWT) 51. Division 3: Joey Brew (Wolv) 42. Division 4: Ryan Dewsbury (Wightwick & Finchfield) 46. Division 5: Neil Walker (Beacon) 40.

Clubman of the Year: Graham Machin (Cannock CC).

Performance of the Year: Muhammad Sultan (Rugeley).

Junior Performance of the Year: Chris Becker (Milford Hall).

Umpire of the Year: Trevor Cotton.

Knockout Cup - First team: Winners Milford Hall; runners-up Cannock.

Second team: Pelsall; runners-up Penn.

Third team: Wednesbury; runners-up Burntwood St Matthews.

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Loan man ends Yeltz losing streak

Halesowen Town 1 Grantham Town 1
HALESOWEN ended their losing streak against in-form Grantham, although a goal in each half from corner kicks left the mid-table clash in the Evo-Stik League Premier Division all square.

Home goalkeeper John Bateman kept out two early long-range free-kicks from Stefan Galinski and Felipe Barcelos on his home debut and also prevented Lee Shaw heading home from the rebound.

Yeltz took the lead after Grantham failed to clear a 20th-minute corner, allowing on-loan Kennedy Digie to squeeze his first Halesowen goal through a crowd of defenders.

But Grantham immediately pressed forward with Lee Shaw scooping just wide and Bateman blocking from Barcelo.

Grantham's half-time team-talk worked wonders and an equaliser soon followed when Galinski headed on for Barcelos to turn and touch home from a 49th-minute corner.

With a good pace to the game, Harry Clifton surged forward to strike a fierce shot off the outside of the Yeltz post in the 53rd minute and Barcelo brought another good save from Bateman.

Halesowen's Tristian Dunkley continued to threaten on his debut when his clever backheel fell just wide after an hour and his 71st-minute header was then saved by Kieran Preston.

But the Gingerbreads looked the more likely to claim any late winner with Danny Meadows heading just over the bar deep in stoppage time.

Glassboys tune up with away victory ahead of cup clash

Ashton United 0 Stourbridge 2
STOURBRIDGE brought all three Evo-Stik Premier points back to the Black Country from Ashton United with an assured display that set them up nicely to Tuesday's home FA Cup clash with Northampton.

A goal in each half from Luke Benbow and Kayleden Brown was enough for Gary Hackett's men, who could have been forgiven for having their minds on the Cobblers clash.

Debutant Ashton goalkeeper Jonathan Mellwaine did well for the home side, saving well from Matt Dodd on just four minutes.

But Stourbridge did take the lead six minutes before the break when Chris Lait's free-kick was headed back into the box for Benbow to finish well for the Glassboys.

Palmed

Ashton could have equalised a minute after the break when Lee Gaskell's shot was palmed on to the bar by Matthew Gould, who fell on the ball to cover it from a potential rebound. But Brown, who had only come on a few minutes before, scored the second on 67 minutes from close range after Tom Tonks' throw was headed on by a home defender.

Three minutes from time, it could have been three, but Brown was denied by Mellwaine as he looked for his double.

Future golf stars come to the fore



Prize-winning youngsters from the academy

FORMER European Tour pro Darren Prosser trod the fairways with some of the world's finest players during his pro career – but is now hoping to tee-up a few stars of the future.

The Dudley-born 48-year-old started the Darren Prosser Golf Academy after deciding to cut back on his playing commitments and turn his attentions to coaching.

Three years on, the academy, based at Kingswinford

Golf Centre is in full swing. It boasts around 50 youngsters while Prosser also passes on his knowledge to a number of pros and county scratch players.

Prosser began playing at Dudley Golf Club and appeared in his first Major in 1988, the British Open at Royal Lytham & St Annes. An impressive amateur career saw Prosser take numerous titles. He also tasted Walker Cup success on American soil in 1989 with Great Britain. He set

up the academy after injuring his wrist.

"I wanted to put something back into the game because it has given me so many great memories," he said.

Staffordshire champion James Wilkes and Shropshire Junior champion Rory McDonald O'Brien are two Prosser proteges making impressive strides.

To join the academy call 07976 236581 or email prosser.d@sky.com

DK VICTORY IS AVON MAULING

Dudley Kingswinford 31
Stratford-upon-Avon 20

DUDLEY Kingswinford went a long way to winning this game in the first 20 minutes when they scored three tries.

The first try followed a penalty kicked into the corner which gave good field position in the Wanderers corner. After a good line out drill there was another penalty awarded deep within the 22, this time the decision was to take a scrummage. Nic Adams showed his pace and finishing skill with a low drive for the corner.

Full-back George Ingram's conversion from the touchline made it 7-0 to DK.

A combination of two quickly taken penalties saw Connah Jones and Tommy Walker injecting the momentum that led to Liam Marshall powering over. Again Ingram added the extras, 14-0.

The third try of the opening burst an individual effort, Stef Shillingford picked the ball up and there was a gap as the Stratford forwards committed to moving to cover an expected DK threat in midfield. George Ingram and Tommy Walker took up good running lines on the outside, pulling the cover away for Shillingford to burst through a tackle for an excellent try. It was 21-0 with Ingram on target again.

Rewarded

Stratford still had an hour to mount a reply and they started to fight their way back into the game and were rewarded with a try to reduce the arrears to 21-5. Stratford came back into contention when a penalty made it 21-8.

With the conditions worsening, the second half was looking like it would turn into a tight battle, but then a scrum just inside their DKs' half was won and Connah Jones delivered good ball to Tommy Huggins, who kicked for Nic Adams to sprint in untouched for his second try. Ingram added the extras 28-8 and four try bonus point.

Heading into the final quarter DK started to fall foul of the referee, picking up three yellow cards and being down to 13 men. Stratford took advantage to the numerical advantage and were able to cross the DK line twice to pull back to 28-20. Back to 15 for the last few minutes, DK finished with an Ingram penalty to finish the first half of the season in fourth place in the league.



Action from Dudley Kingswinford's home match against Stratford-upon-Avon, which saw DKs win 31-20

Athletes make a splash – and dash for it

MORE than 250 triathletes braved the cold to take part in the Black Country Triathletes Splash & Dash Aquathlon at Wombourne Leisure Centre.

The adult race consisted of a 400m swim and a 5k run along the railway walk and back. Overall winners were Steven Hanly in 22:20 and Megan Withers who finished in 26:17.

In the age categories, Karen

Richards took silver in the ladies 40-49 group, in 35:19, Sue Payton also taking silver in the 50-59 group in 35:06 and Wendy Banks taking bronze in the 60-69 age group in 44:05.

For the men, James Lewis finished in bronze position in the 40-49 age group in 25:13 and Keith Bate retained his gold medal in the 60-69 group in 28:49. Reece Ashfield and Ollie

Evans took gold and bronze respectively in the boys youth category and Zoe Brickley and Daisy Briscoe did the same in the girls youth category.

Lydia Silk took gold and Ellie Willis bronze in the TS3 age group, Holly Briscoe took gold and Cian Gopal silver in the TS2 category and Catherine Clews finished in bronze position in the TS1 category.

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